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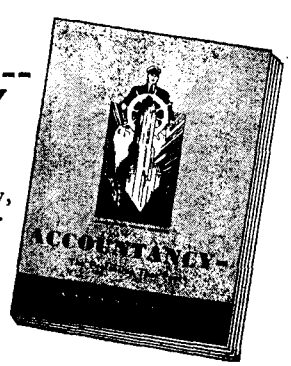

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Volume 304 CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 11, 1941 Number 6

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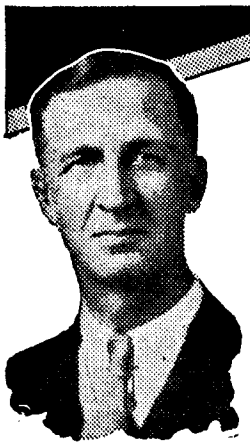

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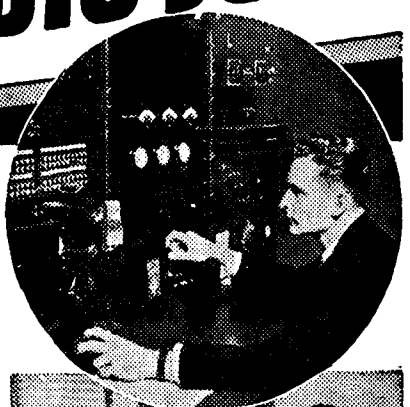

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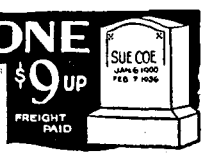

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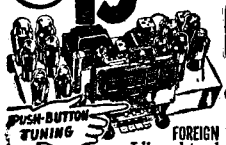

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Stepsons of France

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Street of Swords," "Return to Glory," etc.

I

DELBOIT was grateful for the dark. It kept from him sight of the familiar room, the rough stone walls, his foot-locker at the end of the bunk, his field-case, revolver and service belts each on their separate pegs, the photographs of his mother and father, and the map of the Western Front.

Here in his room he could be alone, and evade for a time the complex necessities of his life. You're a coward, he had thought more than once, and not fit to hold com-

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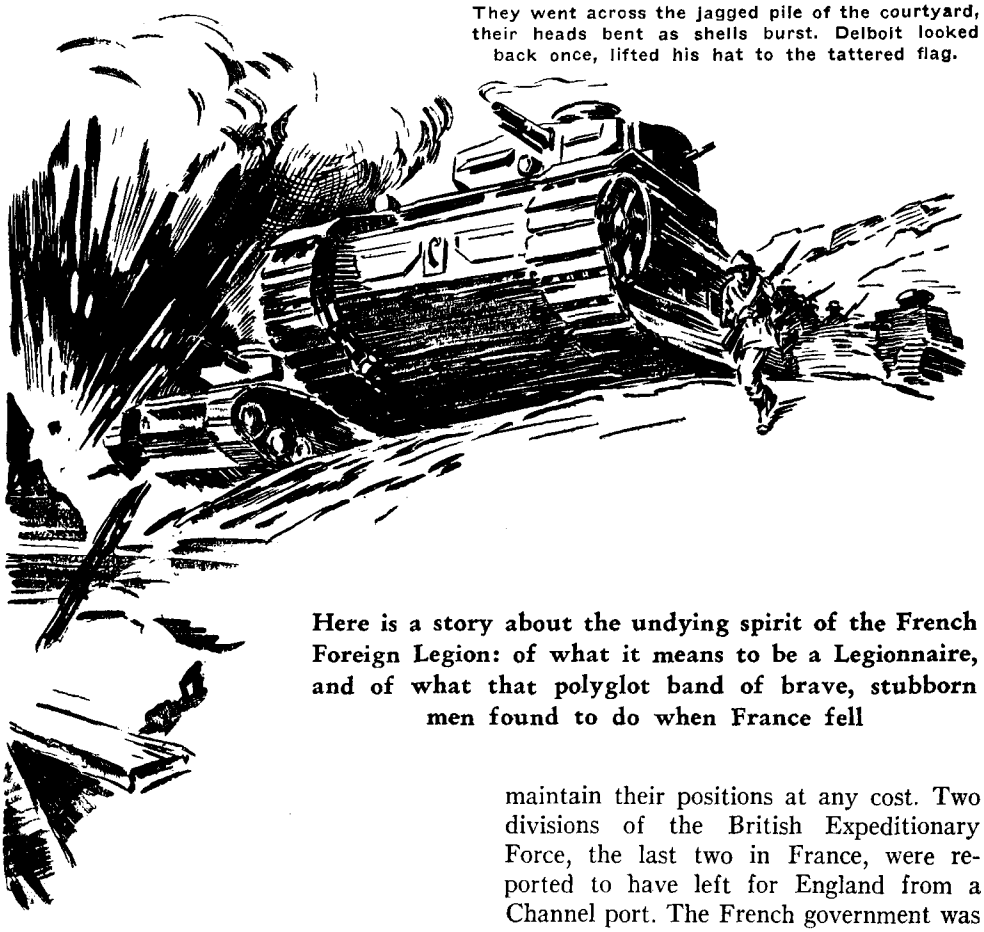

They went across the jagged pile of the courtyard, their heads bent as shells burst. Delboit looked back once, lifted his hat to the tattered flag.

Here is a story about the undying spirit of the French Foreign Legion: of what it means to be a Legionnaire, and of what that polyglot band of brave, stubborn men found to do when France fell

mand of a post of the Legion. You wait for the dark and in it you hide.

He reached up and found the dial of the radio on the shelf overhead, turned it, brought in Paris. Then he lay still, his hands stretched on the bunk rim.

There was music first, and that irritated him. He wanted news, news of the fate of France.

He heard the sentry who walked the rampart. It was Vroow, and his left boot heel squeaked. The mules made a snuffling rustle in their stalls. Some man in the barracks slapped down his cards and grunted profane German.

His fingers were on the dial, tensed to turn it off, when the announcer began to speak. General Weygand had issued an order to all French forces telling them to maintain their positions at any cost. Two divisions of the British Expeditionary Force, the last two in France, were reported to have left for England from a Channel port. The French government was still established at Tours, but might go on to Bordeaux for reasons of safety.

The announcer paused, rattled papers. He began to read War Ministry communiqués, bulletins from the front. They were all bad, told of continued French retreat.

Delboit flicked the dial and the bulb went out, the set was silenced. He struck the side of the set with his fist. It was his impulse to weep. France, he thought—something very great and terrible has happened to my country.

It was no longer possible for him to stay stretched there on the bunk. He rose and lit the lantern, went to the map on the wall. But his brain was too confused for him to relate the meaning of the communiqués to the flat black and white of the map. Dread, a fear that France was

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about to be defeated, numbed his thought. He looked from the map at the photograph of his father.

"What are you thinking tonight?" he asked aloud.

THE knock on the door was quick. Beucken entered as he made it. *"Pardon, mon Lieutenant,"* he said formally, "but I thought you might like to know the news from Paris."

Beucken was fully dressed. The lantern light brought a glitter from his belt buckle and buttons.

"Sit down," Delboit said. The sergeant somehow gave him a feeling of calm, reassured him in his authority.

Beucken sat in a stiff posture on the foot-locker. He gripped his big hands together between his knees and looked straight at Delboit. "It doesn't seem," he said, "as if that shuffle they made on the Rue Dominique is doing a lot of good. Weygand's having no better luck than Gamelin did."

A smile lifted the lines of Delboit's wide, sensitive mouth. "They're both fine soldiers," he said. "What we get here in Morocco doesn't let us figure much who's the better. But Weygand can do the job all right."

"Certainly," Beucken said. He had not yet taken his eyes from Delboit's face. This is a youngster, he thought, who's worried bad. You're the guy to help him, Beucken. There's more than half a hundred of his kind you've put through the mill and made real officers of the Legion.

"I remember back in '16," he said, "when all the news was bad. My lieutenant thought the men didn't know, and he was wrong. So one morning before inspection, I told him, 'Listen, Lieutenant. Let the lads have double wine ration today. They feel as rotten about this as you and me. But the wine will pick them up'."

Delboit stood in the center of the narrow room. He was aware that he was dressed in his undershirt and loose trousers and that Beucken was impeccable. Anger touched his thought.

How long, he wondered, must a man serve in this outfit before he's considered capable of taking care of himself? I'm bored by Beucken and all his silly stories of the old days. This is my post; I command it. I earned my own stripes. They weren't pinned on me coming out of Saint Cyr.

"You must have been sitting in with Yedich," Delboit said, "using the post set. Keep it going that way and you'll burn out even our reserve batteries. Battalion won't send us any more for another month."

"You're right, Lieutenant," Beucken said. The words had been designed as a rebuke to him, he knew, but it wouldn't do any good to accept them that way. He and the youngsters here would have to work together very closely from now until the end. "I told Yedich to shut off the set when I left, and to keep quiet about what we'd heard."

Delboit took a stride across the room. "Go on," he said. "Tell me what I should do—whether or not I should tell the men. Give me another story about the old days. *Que c'est ridicule!* Realize that the old days are gone for good. There's no more sense in trying to make a parallel between then and now. France is all but whipped. And we're stuck here in the High Atlas, isolated, useless, a thousand miles from the front."

"So," Beucken said. "True, Lieutenant." He lifted his gaze again, to the thin and long face, the mobile mouth and broad, deep eyes. Delboit was very angry, he realized, almost hysterical. He stood, and walked slowly past Delboit, halted before the photographs on the wall.

"Where is *m'sieur le colonel,"* he said. "In the Maginot?"

"My father's commanding Fort L'Écluse, at Bellegarde," Delboit said, instant pride in his voice. "Yes, of course he's in the Maginot."

"Men like him won't let us get licked. He's out of the old Legion. When I was doing my first service in Madagascar I heard of him. My sergeant had fought under him against the Black Flags in Indo-China."

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THE rapid pulse of blood slacked in Delboit's forehead. He, too, glanced at the photograph of his father. He smiled, and all his irritation, his rage were gone. "They won't get past Bellegarde the way they got past Sedan," he said.

"Bien sûr," Beucken said. "And we shouldn't listen to all the talk over the radio. Those announcers are a pack of gigolos."

"You don't trust anybody but a Legionnaire," Delboit said, "and that's wrong. But let's have a drink. Here's to us. Here's to the Legion."

He poured Martiniquan rum from the bottle in the corner, filled the metal cups to the brim.

"Good, very good," Beucken said. His pale blue, red-veined eyes shone, then became somber. He held forth the cup. "Please, another."

"You want to make another toast?" Delboit said.

"No." Beucken's voice was rough. He stood with his feet widely set, his thick body forward on his legs. "I just got to thinking about my family in Germany. Thirty years now, since I've seen them. But they're there, my younger brothers and my sisters. This, I got when the last mail came up from battalion." He opened the flap of an upper tunic pocket, half pulled out a letter.

"Read it to me," Delboit said, keeping the words slow and even .

"I know it by heart," Beucken said. "You've already guessed what it says. The *Geheime Staats Polizei* are after them. Those are the real bad boys—the Gestapo. I'm told to leave the Legion, and if I don't leave it, my family will suffer."

Delboit carefully put down the cup. His hands were shaking. "Why do you tell me, Beucken?" he said. "There's nothing I can do."

"Nothing," Beucken said. "But remember that I'm always a Legionnaire. I fought them, my own nation, in the last war. I'll fight them again, any time, any place. Why? I had nothing, no shoes, no coat, when I came to the Legion. I was starving and without hope. But in the Legion they gave me back my pride. As long as I was loyal, as long as I could use my strength, the Legion was my home. It is too late to regret. My brothers could have followed me, or stopped Hitler in their own land . . . Goodnight, Lieutenant. Thank you for the rum."

The door clicked shut in unison with Beucken's stride. Delboit rested as if the man were still in the room and beside him. Then he picked up his cup. "To you, Legionnaire," he whispered. As he drank he watched the photograph of his mother.

He walked close to it, put his fingers on it. You'll be safe, anyhow, he thought. They won't dare do anything to you. The thought opened memory; he was with his mother in the garden of their house at Senlis.

She clipped flowers for the dinner table while he carried her basket. Nounou, the cat, played back and forth across the path, leaping over his mother's slippers. She spoke softly in caution to the cat, and then to him, her son.

"Your father has decided that you won't go to Saint Cyr," she said. "He believes that his own career has already had enough influence upon you. But it's his secret wish that you join the Legion as a common soldier, work up through the ranks. You will do it for him, Julien? To him the Legion is everything; more than you, more than I, or his own life." . . .

The photographs and the room were suddenly insufferable to him. His need for action and the knowledge of his lack of it returned to him. He pulled his tunic, his kepi from the pegs, went out and climbed to the rampart.

II

VROOW had been relieved. The skinny, jumpy American, Jordan, had replaced him. Jordan held his rifle tightly gripped, gazed through a loophole to the south. "Nothing to report, Lieutenant," he said. "Everything's quiet."

Delboit gravely nodded. Among the

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sixty-five men under his command in the post, Jordan was perhaps the most extraordinary. He was serving his first year as a Legionnaire, and had come from Kansas at his own expense to enlist at Oran.

He was quite intelligent; but some of the stories he had read and motion pictures he had seen had given him an almost completely false impression of life in the foreign regiments. He had formed the belief that action was unending, the personnel all heroic and advancement to the rank of officer practically immediate.

Despite his disillusionment during his training period at Sidi-bel-Abbes and the months of his service here in the Atlas, he still kept the conviction that his life was much more exciting than it had been in Kansas.

"That flute's being played yet in the *kasba,*" Delboit said. "Old Mohal must've forgotten the Koran rules and is making a night of it."

"There was a drum playing a while ago, too, sir," Jordan said.

"What kind of a drum?"

"Sounded like a big one, the kind they used to play in the circus parades at home."

"Très bien," Delboit said. He changed his position so he could watch the high-walled native village below in the valley. It lay on a curve of the trail where the wild mountain river had cut very deep, and it blocked all egress to the north. When the post had been built here, the general headquarters staff had been thinking of that, and had equipped the northern bastion with a seventy-five millimeter cannon.

Now the village was closed in a swirl of valley mist. Light came only from the square, thick tower of the house of Mohal, the *caid* and ruler of all the tribesmen in the valley.

Mohal's clan had lived in the valley for many centuries. They considered it their own, and Mohal's acceptance of the French was surly, almost openly restive. He hated all Christians, and in particular the Legion, for they had taken the valley from him.

Mohal would be pleased by tonight's news, Delboit thought. The tough old Ait-Yaddou would never be happy until the post was gone from his valley. But it was unusual for Mohal to play the drums. Those were kept for Ramadan.

Delboit stirred, made cold by the dawn chill, and cursed in a low voice.

"Something wrong, sir?" Jordan said.

"Yes," Delboit said. "That was no drum you heard. It was a plane. Listen, and you can hear it now. The valley echoes made you think it was a drum."

The plane went high, through a cloud. It was lightless. The ruffling drone of the motors passed, then came back. A big bomber, Delboit thought, and not one of ours. The plane had begun to dive, down toward the post.

"A parachute, sir!" Jordan said. His head was back, his mouth agape. "A parachute with a flare attached!"

THE plane rose from the dive with a metallic scream. Delboit saw it for an instant in the greenish fulgence of the parachute flare. But its speed was too great for him to read the wing markings, and all he could distinguish was that the direction it took was away to the north-east.

White, whirling pieces of paper were falling into the post. They had been loosed by the plane, came in ragged eddies like snow. Jordan has his rifle lifted, was poised to fire.

"Take it easy," Delboit told him. "The plane's gone, and those are leaflets it dropped. Go down and get me one."

The leaflets were in very correct French. But the signature at the bottom was broad, black-scrawled: *Il Duce*. They advised "all French forces in Morocco to put down their arms." Resistance, the message ended, would be met by death.

Delboit folded and refolded the one Jordan brought him. *Now you know*: the cold, hard thought formed in his brain. Mussolini's in the game. You're fighting the Italians, and somehow you must be fighting French treachery. That's why you haven't been able to get through on the phone to battalion for the last couple of days.

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His hand crumpled the leaflet. Muscles went tight across his back. He wanted to curse, to yell his hatred and defiance. But men were running out from the barracks into the courtyard. He turned and faced them.

"Bugler," he called, "sound Assembly. Sergeant, I want each man to read a copy of this leaflet."

He went down into the courtyard after Beucken had drawn up the men. They were very silent, at the rigid attention. He went past them and into the little leanto that housed the post radio set. Yedich sat there red-eyed and nervous, the earphones pulled over his short-cropped skull.

"Try Rabat," Delboit said. "Then Casablanca and Meknes and every post between here and the coast."

Yedich worked the key fast, his body bent over it. "No answer, Lieutenant," he said. "There's a lot of talk on the air, but none in answer to mine."

"What do you pick up?" Delboit said, almost whispering.

"Some commercial station," Yedich said. "And all they keep talking is that Paris has fallen."

"Confirm that if you can." It was Delboit's belief that his voice did not belong to him, that it was some other man who uttered the guttural and heavy words he pronounced. He leaned against the table, feeling giddy, sick.

Sweat ran down Yedich's flat brow, he noticed. There were beads of sweat upon Yedich's hairy fingers. The man was a Yugoslav. It wasn't his country, his capital that were threatened. But still the sweat of fear was on him.

"I've got it confirmed, sir," Yedich said.

"How?"

"From Paris."

"But in what way?"

"The government station at Paris is broadcasting in German."

"Thank you," Delboit said. He moved, forced himself to move out into the courtyard. Beucken stood in front of the men, stiffly saluted and reported.

Delboit halted, his heels met. He waited for a long moment before he spoke. At times, he recalled, he had told himself that these men were stolid, if not stupid. But they weren't now. Their eyes watched him the way an eagle watched a valley sheep. If he showed fear, it would spread to them.

"Legionnaires," he said, "I have a very simple thing to tell you. Paris has just fallen. That very probably may mean the entire downfall of France. I've tried to reach the posts to the north, and headquarters at Rabat. There is no response. We're threatened by the Italians, warned that if we don't put down our arms we'll meet death.

"I'm your commander, but I'm also a Legionnaire. So I can't lie to you. If we're really cut off, the Italians have a chance of making good their boast. But we've got an old boast of our own. We've always wanted to fight alone, share our glory with no other outfit. Here's the place for us to do it. What do you say?"

It came in a single shout at first, and from Beucken. Then the others yelled in a great roar:

"We fight!"

He smiled at them. "Very good, comrades. That's all any of us has to know."

III

THE men sat around the barracks stove after supper. Ildakeff was the one who banged his boot against the stove and asked them, "What are we going to do—stay here to be bowled over like sheep?"

"No," Jordan said; "of course not." But once he had said that he felt embarrassed, unsure of himself: he was the youngest man here.

But nobody else seemed to want to answer the Russian, and over in the corner old Vroow was playing his harmonica, veins purple in his forehead from the wine he'd drunk.

Vroow sang a Dutch song, about a Rotterdam girl and the sailor who took her for a walk on the dike. "Fine town, Rotterdam," Vroow said, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "My town. But

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I don't want to see it again. Let Hitler's boys have it. Here in the Legion we get food and wine every day."

"Shut up, souse," Ildakeff said. "What few brains you had are pickled solid."

Ildakeff stood and tapped his kepi down at an angle. He was a handsome man, lean and rangy. The double row of ribbons on his chest, his record and the fact that he was senior corporal gained him almost as much respect among the men as Beucken.

He stared at them, his dark eyes brilliant. "Action," he said, "is the only thing that will save us. Not sitting here on our hunkers."

"You do anything the lieutenant doesn't order," Brabec said, "and you'll get your hunkers kicked good."

Ildakeff strode instantly to him. He pushed Brabec backward from his stool. "It takes a Czech," he said, "to make plenty of talk but no sense. You're no real Legionnaire, and no fighter. Hitler seized your country without a shot. You're in the Legion only because the French wouldn't feed you as a civilian."

Brabec got up punching. Ildakeff was ready. He knocked the stockier, younger man down, and down again. Brabec finally lay and moaned in soft, broken gasps through his pulped lips. Ildakeff spat in contempt. "Next time," he said, "I'll knock that button nose right off your stupid face."

Yedich was up, a stool in his hand. "Let the man be," he said. "The Czechs are all right and he's all right."

"So?" Ildakeff asked, but he made no move toward the radio operator. Yedich was well-liked, and very quick in a fight. A brawl with him would be a mistake. Ildakeff turned. "Hey, harmonica; how much of that stolen wine have you got left?"

Vroow slyly smiled. "Who can prove it's stolen, and who can prove I've got any?"

"Your belly's stretched with it now," Ildakeff said. He walked with a slow pace to the old Dutchman, took a closely folded ten franc note from his pocket. "Come on, get some out. All the boys want a drink tonight. I'm willing to pay."

VROOW put the harmonica down on the bench. He gave Ildakeff an upward, blinking glance. "You're still wearing epaulettes," he said, "and riding a white horse at the head of your Ataman Cossacks. This is the Legion, chum. When I steal wine, it's for myself."

"How about a couple of quarts of that anisette you can buy in the village?" Ildakeff spread out the note wide. "There's a lot more kick in that than in issue wine."

Vroow nodded, went stumbling through the door.

The others were glancing out into the courtyard. Delboit and Beucken were standing in front of the lieutenant's room. Delboit made small, expressive gestures with his hands as he talked. "Telling Beucken what to tell us," Ildakeff said. "Our boy lieutenant is badly worried."

"Who isn't?" Yedich said. But then Vroow was back in the room, and he carried four canteens.

The men drank fast, one after the other. Ildakeff gave his share to Yedich. "I'll get more later," he told him. "Now what I want is the news from France. Sneak over and start up the set."

"It'd be taking a chance," Yedich said. "Beucken gave me orders this morning not to use the set without the lieutenant's permission."

"To hell with the lieutenant," Ildakeff said vehemently. "He and Beucken are in there now listening to his own set. The phone wire to battalion has been down for days now. We've got just as much right to know what's happening as they have."

Yedich reeled a bit crossing the courtyard. "I'm kind of drunk," he muttered. "Haven't had so much wine since payday."

"You probably won't get paid again in this outfit." Ildakeff pulled open the door of the leanto for him, helped start the set. Yedich's face became stern as he put on the ear-phones, and he crouched forward, then took pencil and paper, wrote.

Ildakeff read the words over his shoulder. The phrase, *"Sauve qui peut"* was repeated several times, and the call letters of the Colonial Army headquarters station at

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Rabat. The rest was illegible; Yedich made a thick, confused scrawl.

Ildakeff roughly shook him. "What are they saying?" he said. "What is it?"

"The Reynaud cabinet has resigned," Yedich said. He was trembling. "An order has been issued by Pétain for the arrest of Daladier and Bonnet and a lot of the other big shots who're over here in Africa.

"Pétain is head of the new government. He's given in to the Germans. There's going to be an armistice. We'll all be shot if we don't put down our arms.

"That's what the guy at Rabat says, and I've asked him three times. All the other posts from here to the coast are doing that —putting down their arms. Pétain has sold out France."

"Maybe he couldn't do anything else," Ildakeff said. "But keep still; shut off the set. We've got to think about ourselves, and what this means to us."

He went striding back to the barracks, a yard or so ahead of Yedich. He paused at the doorway, wanting to make a dramatic entrance. Think of yourself, Piotr, he said under his breath.

You owe the Legion nothing. They've worked you like a *moujik* here, given you only a corporal's stripes although you were trained as a Royal Cadet and served with Denikin and Wrangel and Semanov, all the old tough ones . . .

HIS hands smoothed his tunic down over his flat hips. He pulled his kepi a little more over his right eye, then stepped into the lamp-lit room.

"It's finished!" he called. "The station at Rabat is telling the guys at all the posts to save themselves. The French are licked and are asking for an armistice. We're trapped if we stay in this dump. So who'll come with me? Who'll make a break for the coast?"

A faint, yet hoarse sound came from the men: The rush of their expelled breathing. They gathered around Ildakeff, talking, gesticulating.

"Don't get excited," he said. He was smiling and calm. "There's been spots a lot worse than this. After all, I've got the keys to the rifle racks right in my pocket."

Jordan was white-faced. "You're a traitor," he said. "We belong to the Legion and should take our orders from Delboit."

"Forget such foolishness," Ildakeff said, and swung to catch Jordan by the shoulder. Jordan was running toward the door. But he stopped there, and said, "I'm glad to see you, Sergeant. There's—there's real bad trouble here."

Beucken came easily and quietly into the room. Rage burned in his brain, down into his stomach, through all his body. The news he had heard on Delboit's radio had caused it. They would destroy the Legion, he thought, wreck all that had been good and fine in his life.

This in the barracks didn't bother him. He could take care of the Russian with one hand. But the Legion . . .

He walked close to Ildakeff. The other men stood back from them, seeing the furious play of nerves, the congested blood in Beucken's face.

"What will it be?" Beucken said in a low tone. "You can't be fool enough to want to go over the hill alone. There's nobody else who'll desert from here with you. Our one hope is to stick together, face the job ahead like Legionnaires."

Ildakeff laughed mockingly. "You've got no other place to go," he said. "You've been in the Legion so long you can't take any initiative for yourself. All you're good for is to follow your officers' orders, right or wrong. That's not true for me, though; I know how and when to get out."

"Sure, you do," Beucken said. "You've got out of every outfit you've served. For you, the Legion has just been another dump where you were stuck for a while by necessity. Now the going's tough, you'll leave it.

"Before you go, though, I'm going to fix that dial of yours a little, so it won't look so pretty to the next bunch of guys you try to fool into thinking you're a soldier."

Ildakeff had been in complete control of

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himself, without rage or any extreme emotion. But the gray-haired man's words took swift effect, immediately aroused his rage.

Beucken was right, he knew. Never, never in his life, had he experienced anything but failure. From the beginning, even back there at the Royal Academy at Constanta, it had been defeat instead of victory.

MEMORIES crossed his brain in a rapid, vivid rush. It was 1919 again, and he was sixteen, proud of his white tunic and the fact that he was a Royal Cadet who still served the cause of the Little Father, Nicholas, the Czar. He and the other cadets at the Academy at Constanta had defended the city against the Bolsheviks until only eight of them in the white tunics were alive.

There had been glory then, aboard the American destroyer that took him and the other survivors to safety. But the glory hadn't lasted. A little was left in the armies of Denikin and Wrangel; but it was tawdry, dim, a shadow of something already dead.

Then in Harbin, Shanghai, Rangoon, Paris, life had held nothing but slow terror. You ate, if you were lucky, and strong enough to take your food from the other weak.

He leaned forward slightly and struck at Beucken. "You are a German pig," he said, "and the Legion is your bucket of slops."

Beucken took the blow on his left forearm. He hit back grinning, savagely pleased to find physical expression for his rage. Ildakeff was big, and proud, the kind of man to take a beating. Well, all right, he'd give it. He'd whip the fellow until he couldn't walk.

They struck, wrestled and kicked for more than half an hour. Ildakeff knew all the Cossack tricks, and all the tricks of the slums. But he lacked the German's weight, and the steadfast, constant pressure of Beucken's blows.

Beucken forced him back, never gave him time to get fully set to strike. He cut Beucken about the face many times; he could see the effect of his blows, the trickle of blood down the broad chin, the puffed eyes and raw-raked cheekbones. Blood ran down his own face, though, and was in his mouth. He staggered now, and his sense of pride was gone; it was replaced by a sensation of fear.

He hastened his blows, attempted to rush Beucken. A fist he didn't see caught him behind the ear. The room seemed to turn, swing up and down. Then he was on his hands and knees. He felt the packed earth of the floor. Beucken's boots were in front of him, spattered with blood and sweat, firmly placed.

He looked dazedly from the boots, up along the thick calves to the belt, to the face. The face appeared huge, and there was a grin upon the bloody mouth. "Get up," the mouth said. "You're the lad who'd lead others in mutiny."

He sprang up and jabbed his fist at the mouth. He missed, was punched heavily, and clung to Beucken with his hands. Beucken knocked him away, headlong. That time he felt only the pain. But he rose and flailed his fists, sought to find Beucken by Beucken's blows.

The pain was a flame: it dazzled him so that he saw nothing, felt nothing. He fell down unconscious right at Beucken's feet.

Beucken made a motion to the men who stood along the walls. "Put him in his bunk," he said. "Take care of him. He's a fool, but not a coward."

To go out into the night air was like entering icy water. Beucken quivered. You're not so young, he thought. That guy almost measured you. But you showed him what it really means to be a Legionnaire . . .

Delboit recognized the slow footsteps. He did not turn where he stood on the rampart, still faced toward the village. But then he smelled the blood, heard the painful breathing. "What's wrong?" he asked quickly.

"Ildakeff," Beucken said, "got big ideas in his head again. When I came into the

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barracks, he was starting talk of a mutiny."

Delboit kept quite still. "He's a difficult man," he said. "I realize the reasons why you had to whip him. But we haven't much time left for that sort of thing. There's an armored column down in the valley past the village."

"French?" Beucken said.

"No. Mohal and his lot would've fired on a French outfit. I believe that it's Italian."

"Then we fight?"

"We fight."

IV

THE Italian lieutenant came up the slope to the barbed wire with his Askari sergeant-major before him carrying a white flag on a carbine bayonet. He stopped at the wire and cupped his hands to his mouth. "I would like to talk with the officer commanding," he called.

A rifle barrel scraped the side of a loophole. He could see the small blue rim of the muzzle, and other muzzles. They were trained on him and the Askari. He kept his body motionless, looking steadily up at the post.

Flies crawled his boots, his face. A wasp settled on the Askari's turban, then went down the black, gleaming face.

"Steady Rakhud," he said whispering.

"I am, *Signor teniente,*" Rakhud said. "Bullets bite worse than wasps."

Boot heels rapped along the rampart walk. A man wearing a gold-looped officers kepi showed himself at an embrasure. "Who are you?"

"The commanding officer of the column in the village. I'm here at the orders of Marshal Rodolpho Graziani of the Imperial Italian Army to ask for your surrender. Permit me to enter so that I may talk with you."

Delboit drew back from the embrasure. Beucken knelt at one of the Hotchkiss machine guns, his hands taut on the grips. "What do you think?" Delboit asked him.

"No harm in talking to the guy," Beucken said. "If he's got this far, he must know how many we are and how we're armed. And you might find out a couple of things from him about their main force."

"Fall in a full section guard at the gate," Delboit said. "I'm going to change my tunic."

. . . Beucken had picked the guard with care, Delboit saw, coming out of his room. Ildakeff was among them, and it was typical of Beucken to include the Russian. The way Beucken figured the Legion must never make a bad showing, and Ildakeff had the most soldierly bearing in the outfit.

"Open the gate," Delboit said.

The heavily planked and barred gate slowly swung.

"Enter," Delboit said.

The Italian lieutenant entered at once, the Askari three paces behind him. He halted just inside the arch, brought up his hand to his sun helmet in salute.

A good-looking young guy, Delboit thought. The Italian was clean-shaven, tanned; his gray-green uniform was fitted well to his compact body. His glance went past Delboit to the guard, narrowed as he studied each man in turn.

"Your name, rank and duty?" Delboit nervously asked.

"Arnaldo Fecci, senior lieutenant of the Eighth Motorized Regiment of African Light Horse. My orders are to ask for your immediate surrender."

Delboit nodded. "Julien Delboit," he said, "senior lieutenant of the Sixth Company of the Third Regiment of the Legion. Say what you have to say."

FECCI wore gloves, and his hands sweated inside of them. This wasn't Italian Army style. He wasn't prepared to talk right out, and the eyes of the guard were hard, keen upon him.

"Surrender for you is necessary," he blurted. "The show's all over in France. The Pétain government issued an order several days ago dissolving the Legion. Haven't you received that?"

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"No," Delboit said. "But if we had it wouldn't make any difference to us. We take our orders from soldiers, not politicians."

Blood rose in Fecci's face. "I've been commanded," he said, "to take this place by force if you don't surrender. My outfit is equipped with mortars, quick-firers and flame-throwers. We can knock your post into a heap."

"Try it," Delboit said, his eyes hot.

"You're a fool," Fecci said. He was suddenly enraged. "I'm no parade-ground soldier, not the kind that ran at Guadalajara in Spain. In the Ethiopian campaign, I was with the column that crossed the Danakil desert, then broke Ras Gugsa's force. I'm a professional soldier, and my men are professionals. We've taken every other one of your regiment's posts to the north."

"Get out," Delboit said, and turned his back on him.

There was a slight scuffle at the gate. One of the sentries bumped into the big Askari sergeant-major, muttered something to him in bad Italian.

"What did that man say to you, Rakhud?" Fecci asked when they were down the slope and through the barbed wire.

"He told me that my chevrons were too big for my sleeves and should be pinned to the seat of my pants, *Signor teniente.*"

"And you answered?"

"*Signor teniente,* I told him their hearts would not be too big for the vultures."

Fecci grinned. "Very good, Rakhud. *Il Duce* himself would be proud of your answer."

THE Italian tanks and armored cars came over the ridge early in the afternoon. Their quick-firers caught the frontal rampart, then the lookout tower.

The tower collapsed in a grinding slide of masonry and beams. Two men were killed in it and half a dozen others wounded.

The wounded were still screaming when Delboit pulled the breech cover off the seventy-five millimeter gun mounted on the north bastion. Beucken and Vroow helped him serve the piece; but their opening bursts were bad, and short. Then Delboit lifted the range and they made a direct hit upon the turret of a tank in the center of the jerking line.

Flame flared, roared over the tank. It toppled like an immense beetle. A man staggered out from it, and his blackened body carried flame. He pitched blindly down, flopped and twisted for several seconds.

Horror held Delboit. Then bullets snapped and cracked past his head. The machine gunners in the armored cars were using him as a direct target. He ducked instinctively, went prone.

Beucken had gone from the seventy-five to handle one of the Hotchkiss guns. He fired into the slits of the tanks and cars, and had already stopped one of them. All the other men able to stand were at their regular positions. They used their rifles skillfully, throwing the bolts with a quick snap, taking care for each shot.

But rifles weren't enough, Delboit knew. The tanks were right in against the rampart, careening against the gate and the rubble-stone walls. He shoved a case of grenades into Beucken's hands. "Drop them down and under," he shouted. "Get them under the tanks."

He jumped the steps two at a time into the courtyard. Dust and smoke filled the air. Shell fragments sent a whipping whine all about him. A wounded man crawled before him, held up his hands in appeal. "Later, soldier," Delboit muttered. "Later. . . ."

He dragged three cases of grenades out of the arsenal, ripped the tops loose in the courtyard. He filled his pockets, stacked a pile in the crook of his left arm. When he was a kid, he remembered strangely, he had stacked pine cones for the living room fireplace that way.

Men came toward him through the obscurity as he started for the gate. He recognized Jordan by his wild force. "What can I do to help, Lieutenant?"

"Drag over more of those grenades. They're trying to break through the gate.

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Hey, you, Sedowski—tell the sergeant I want him at the gate!"

Planks hung brokenly from the heavy framework in the archway. The big bars were bent, and the whole structure swayed. The high-rearing tractor tread of a tank crashed over a bar, kept coming forward.

Delboit took a grenade pin in his teeth, jerked it. He wasn't sure where the grenade struck, but it was underneath that tread.

FLAME scorched his sight. Explosion wracked his ears, knocked him sidewise. I've dropped the grenades, he thought. Where the hell are they?

Men whose strong black legs showed beneath flapping khaki shorts were coming through what had been the gate. They were Askaris. They carried bayoneted carbines and their own grenades.

He reached out, fumbled another grenade to him, tried to pull the pin. Then men he knew leapt past him: Beucken, Vroow, Jordan, a lot more. They blocked his vision of the Askaris. He got to his feet, set his body in motion, but only the Legion was there.

"All gone?" he asked.

"Every guy who tried to come inside," Beucken said. "The armored stuff is pulling back, down the slope. That bit with the grenades was too much for them."

Delboit gestured. "Get the men back on the wall. Give me a hand with the seventy-five again. We've got to knock them off while there's time."

He and Beucken served eight more rounds from the seventy-five. They pounded the shells squarely in among the steel-cased machines. But oily, low-drifting smoke was over the slope. Their targets were lost to them in it, although a steady drum-fire still ranged the ramparts.

"Might as well save our rounds," Beucken said. "They'll tear us up with those quick-firers if we stay here."

"Right," Delboit said. "Tell the men to stand down. All I want on guard is Hotchkiss and auto-rifle crews, and the corporals can pick them. But the wounded should be taken care of first."

He was helping with the wounded in the courtyard when the shell struck the seventy-five gun. It was a mortar shell and came over with a slow, high whine. The men who carried the wounded dropped them, flung flat. A screeching roar of splintered metal filled the air.

The barrel of the seventy-five whirled like a weird and terrible toy, up, far up in the yellow-orange gout of explosion, then faster down, so fast they couldn't see it.

But they could hear it. It tore through the upper wall and sheet tin roof of the barracks, and embedded thudding in the rear wall.

The men stared at each other, unashamed of their personal fear. A couple of them cursed, but the rest were wordless, sick with their fear. "On your way, lads," Delboit said. "We can put a new roof on that."

He went stiffly back to the bastion to see the damage there. The gun emplacement was a shattered mass of rubble. The tailpiece of the gun was left, and shredded bits of a shell hamper; that was all. Nerves quickened in his stomach as he pondered what would have happened if he and Beucken had stayed beside the gun.

He looked into the valley. The Italian machines were withdrawn beneath the ridge crest. No weapon he had here possessed the power to reach them. Unless they attacked again—came up through the flattened barbed wire—his machine guns, rifles and grenades were no good.

All Fecci had to do was wait. A steady, well-ranged fire from the mortars would reduce the post to a dust heap within a day or two.

Sweat trickled down Delboit's face. For the first time in many years he felt need of his father. But his father was up at Fort Bellegarde, in the Maginot. It was quite probable that he was dead or captured, and certain that he'd been trapped as they were here. His mother . . .

He kept thought of his mother vague; he did not let it enter his extreme consciousness. Later, maybe, he told himself, he could afford to think of her.

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BEUCKEN came up the steps with a canteen of wine and a loaf of bread. "Here, Lieutenant," he said. "Work on a bit of this. We did all right before, and we'll do all right every time they try us.

"The men are taking it easy in the barracks. I've got them to clean up the joint and the wounded are fixed. We can change the guard pretty soon, and send these lads down to eat."

Delboit gave him a searching glance. "Do you really think we'll win?" he said.

"Sure," Beucken said. "We're already ahead plenty. We made them pay hard for what they took. Our main loss was the seventy-five, and that doesn't count for much. The only other place I ever served a piece like that was over at Agadir. But it was an old eighty-eight millimeter without any recoil mechanism. It jumped right smack off the rampart of the *kasba* and down the hill through the town. Tore up a couple of houses and ripped a café all to hell. There wasn't a sound bottle left in the joint."

Delboit tried to smile. "Your C. O. must have had a couple of cute words for you."

A clamor of voices came from the barracks. A man ran out from there, and then another man, and the second man held a rifle. It was Jordan who ran, blood streaming from his side. Ildakeff followed him, fired a shot that whirled up dirt.

"Stay away from us, clown," Ildakeff said. "We'll settle it in our own style."

Delboit did not speak, did not take his pistol from the holster. This was mutiny, he thought while he descended the steps side by side with Beucken. Ildakeff was leading a mutiny against him.

"I did my best, Lieutenant," Jordan said. He was weeping, his hands smeared with blood from his wound. "But they wouldn't listen to me, and then Ildakeff let go and shot me."

"Why?" Delboit hoarsely said.

"Some of them are badly frightened. They think the Italians can take the post. Ildakeff told them they'd be killed if they stay, and now they should get out of here. I told them—"

"I can guess what you told them," Delboit said. "Sit over there by the wall. Keep quiet. The sergeant and I will handle this."

Beucken stood wide-legged. "You're taking a big risk," he said, "to go in there now. The Russian's the kind to get them worked up real rough. Let me do it. I'd shoot Ildakeff as soon as look at him."

"Get back," Delboit said. "I don't want any man shot."

HE WENT into the barracks carrying his pistol, but low, and down against his thigh. The room was smoke-roiled, acrid with the smell of explosive and blood.

Most of the men were at the far end of the room, in front of the rifle racks. Ildakeff and about half a dozen others rested in a tight group in the aisle between the cots. The hole in the roof let a shimmer of the late afternoon sunlight down over the Russian's face, giving it a somber, tense cast.

"Turn around, Ildakeff," Delboit said, "and talk to me. I'm your commander."

"No, you're not," Ildakeff said. He raised the Lebel waist-high. "You're nothing but a stupid Frenchman who can think only of the glory of your flag. We're through with that. We're getting out of here. Take all the glory you can get before the Italians cut you up like mutton."

"It's strange," Delboit said, "that yesterday all of you here told me that you were willing to fight." His words weren't for Ildakeff, but for the men at the end of the room. One or two of them were moving, lowering the rifles they held.

"What's happened to change you; the fact that a couple of your comrades have been killed? If you don't consider yourselves Legionnaires—if you're cowards—go ahead, get out of here. The Italians will catch you, or the tribesmen, and you'll suffer a worse death. Here at least you'll die defending your post, and together, as men."

"Nice talk," Ildakeff said. "Very nice, but it doesn't make sense. Out of my way, Delboit, or I'll kill you."

Jordan shot from the doorway. His

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bullets sheared the strap button from the side of Ildakeff's kepi. Then a lot of rifles were fired, all at once. Men ducked, ran, yelled. Ildakeff was down, beneath one of the cots. He rose and leapt at the window, was through and in the courtyard.

"No!" Delboit cried. "Stop firing!" But the men who had been with Ildakeff were following him through the window. Delboit saw the blurred passage of their bodies, heard the sounds they made as they climbed to the mule-shed roof, jumped over the rear wall.

Beucken was in the courtyard. His pistol rang repeatedly as he fired. More men were at the windows, shooting up at the rear wall.

Delboit went among the men at the windows, hurled them back into the room. "I gave you an order," he said. "Now you must obey it, Legionnaires."

"Yes, Lieutenant," they said one by one, and unconsciously assumed the position of order arms.

"Stack your pieces in the racks," he said. "Remember that there are wounded men who need your care."

He stood by the door while he waited for Beucken. Beucken came back with Jordan.

"The kid says he just lost his head," Beucken said. "He thought Ildakeff was going to let you have it, so he fired. It's too bad, but seven of those guys got over the wall. Ildakeff was too fast for me, and all I got was that dumb Rumanian, Pedrescu."

It was difficult for Delboit to find speech. None of them understood fully, he thought, and Beucken least of all. Life didn't count. What counted was honor, and dying like a soldier. To shoot a man because he was for the moment confused and mutinous was wrong. That destroyed honor itself.

He brought his attention back to Beucken and said slowly, "I'm putting you in charge of the barracks, Sergeant. The men should be fed so that the guard on the walls can be relieved."

"Très bien, mon Lieutenant," Beucken said, and met his heels, saluted him. "But how about this kid?"

Delboit reached and touched Jordan's shoulder. "If your wound doesn't hurt you too much, give Vroow a hand with the supper detail."

He had the idea returning to the wall that he had climbed these steps a hundred times today. Empty cartridges, an auto-rifle clip, a roll of bandage and some man's broken pipe littered them.

Behind in the courtyard, two of the post dogs were playing, yapping and rolling each other in the dirt. The smell of resinous pine and cooking food came from the shed where Vroow and the American worked.

If he just shut his eyes, he thought, it would seem like a day of peace. But he couldn't shut his eyes. He commanded here.

V

THE dusk was very brief, the fall of night swift. The stars were small and white and very bright. Smoke from the fires the Italians had built below the ridge shafted pale gray against the darkness.

"I'm going down there pretty soon," Delboit told Beucken. "I'm going to ask for volunteers and take a raiding party right into their camp. They may get us, but before we're through a lot of their iron-clads will be wrecked."

Beucken pressed his spatulate thumb down upon the tobacco in his pipe bowl. He lit the tobacco, took a long inhalation. "What's the matter, Lieutenant?" he said. "Have they got you whipped?"

Delboit whirled around on him. "What do you mean? There's nothing else to do. They've got the range on us. They can shell us day and night until we're all dead or gone crazy from shock. This place wasn't built for defense against concentrated shell fire."

"No, it wasn't," Beucken said. He watched the irregular jerk of nerves at the corner of the other's mouth, the haggard pallor of the sensitive narrow-molded face. He felt a profound sympathy and tenderness, wanted to put his arm around

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Delboit's shoulder in a close embrace.

"I know how bad it is," he said. "We buried sixteen of them in that corner back of the mule shed. All of them good men, too. But you're worried by more than the lads who were killed here today. You're thinking of your folks at home, of your father and mother. It's right that you should. After all, I'm older than you and I've seen a lot of tough stuff, and I'm doing the same thing. It's not right, though, that we should take the rest of this lot out to be killed."

"They're Legionnaires," Delboit said in a dull voice. "Each one of them chose to stay here and take orders from me." He looked around at Beucken, and the rage, the despair, were open in his eyes. "What else? What else? The politicians have sold my country and my flag. All we can do is die."

"Not if we're real Legionnaires," Beucken said. "Hitler's taken your country, just about the same way he took mine. Our deaths won't win anything back now. We've got to wait until later, and for the day when France will be strong enough to free itself and there'll be another, new Legion. Then will be our time."

Light came into Delboit's eyes. "I got to hating your guts tonight," he said. "I thought you were just another blockhead German. But you're right. You make sense. If we can get out of here and wait, maybe we'll have a chance."

"Fine," Beucken said. "I know that much, but no more. How do you figure we get out?"

"I'll go down and have a talk with Mohal," Delboit said. "The Chleuh might be willing to fight with us against the Italians, and Mohal can muster more than a hundred warriors."

"Mohal's got use for nobody but his own people."

"He'll listen to me, anyhow."

"Sure, he'll listen. But he'll probably send some of his lads to lift your head on the way back."

"It's a gamble," Delboit said, "and if we win it, we win a whole lot."

HE CHANGED his boots to soft-soled native slippers, and wore a pullover sweater. His heavy Ruby pistol was secured to his wrist by a lanyard, and he carried a trench knife, a pair of grenades and half a dozen spare pistol clips.

Beucken darkened his face and hands with gun grease, then helped him over the sandbags at the gate. "Good luck, *sidi,*" Beucken said.

"Thanks," he said. "Mohal won't get my head."

He crawled prone through the barbed wire. The high grass on the other side, white with dew, twined about his ankles. He was forced to stop from time to time to free himself, and his progress was slow.

A field mouse crawled warm and quick over his knife hand, then scampered squeaking. Partridge chicks chittered in their nest somewhere close, and up in a live-oak tree a mother baboon let go a yammered, throaty cry.

He halted, hunched still after he heard the baboon. Maybe some of the Italian troops were smart enough to recognize by the baboon's sound that a man passed here. But there was no challenge from the Italian positions; the men continued about their duties. They were hauling up an armored car by hand, emplacing it where it could fully rake the post.

On his way back, he thought, he would take care of that . . .

Dogs barked roughly at him from within the *kasba* walls. He crawled nearer, across the trail, and the ground under his hands had been scored by the treads of the Italian tanks and armored cars. They were all parked up at the far end of the valley, he told himself. Fecci must have decided not to leave his men within immediate range of Mohal's sharpshooters.

He rose erect when he was right before the *kasba* gate. Now was the moment. Either they let him in, or they shot him. He pounded upon the gate with his pistol butt. *"Salaam aleikum,"* he said. *"Salaam,* Mohal. I come in peace."

Men he did not see opened the gate. They pulled him in and took away his

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weapons. "Take me to Mohal," he said, keeping his voice quiet. "I am the man who commands the post."

Mohal had a three-story house for his women and his children, but he chose to live in a black goatskin tent pitched in the courtyard. He sat upright in the middle of it, his arms folded over his silver-marked Winchester rifle.

Light from little mutton-fat lamps came broadly upon him. He was a very old and slender man; and he wore the green head-cloth that signified he had made the holy pilgrimage to Mecca.

"You look for me?" he said.

"For you, *caid*," Delboit said. "I need your help. You and your people will be well paid if you give it."

MOHAL sat silent. The lamp flames fluttered and his bony face took deep, dark lines; the narrow mouth and the small, fierce eyes showed sharp. Delboit did not let his gaze waver. This, he thought, was a man to fear much more than Fecci.

He said, "There are those who are here to take the post from me and my men. They would hold all the valley for themselves. Fight with us, the Legion, and I will give to each of your men a rifle and a hundred rounds of ammunition when it's over."

"No," Mohal said. He recrossed his skinny ankles under the edge of his ragged robe.

"You will help them?" Delboit said.

"No. We will help no *roumi*. It is our hope that you will destroy each other."

"You will fight if I give you the guns first?"

"When we want guns," Mohal said, "we will take them." He made a small shrugging gesture with one shoulder. "In time, all the guns we need will be ours."

"You—" Delboit said. But the clansmen had his wrists from behind, were swinging him out from the tent to the gate. They gave him back his weapons at the gate.

One of them, a young and blond warrior, laughed at him. "Don't fight them too hard," the warrior said. "They are too many for you, and they have very nice guns."

Delboit made no answer. He was being pushed out into the darkness, and the gate was shut in his face. "Damn you;" he said aloud as he started back up the slope, rage hot and hard in his stomach. "Damn you and all your kind. We'll win here yet."

FECCI sat close to the fire in the shallow trench as he wrote his report. He mustn't be too optimistic, he thought; but certainly he could tell his colonel that the action here would be finished tomorrow. The great stone-work map on the wall of the Via Trionfi back in Rome would be changed again to mark another triumph for *Fascismo* and Italian arms.

He lifted the pen for a moment from the neatly written page. Out in the darkness a baboon yammered, and then at the Chleuh village dogs barked. The Russian deserter, Ildakeff, had got up and was advancing toward him.

"Excuse me, Lieutenant," Ildakeff said.

"What is it?" Fecci asked harshly.

"I believe that the French commander has just sent somebody over to dicker with the Chleuh. They're bad news, the Chleuh, and can muster about a hundred rifles."

Fecci smiled. "I have no fear of them," he said. "Their *kasba* is just as easy a target for my cannons as the Legion post. But if you're worried, take those men who came with you and go out and get that messenger. You've told me that you're eager to fight for us."

"I am, Lieutenant," Ildakeff said, his hands tensed. He'd like to hit the Italian square in the face, he thought. Fecci was too cocky, too contemptuous of him. "Still, the other men aren't quite willing to go out now. They think they should be better treated here. It's their idea they're being held almost as prisoners."

Fecci rose and folded his report. "They're right," he said. "How can I be sure you're not here to betray my outfit in turn?"

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"Please, Ildakeff said, his face flushed, his hands closed to fists. "You seem to forget that we came to you of our own volition. Either treat us as honest soldiers, or let us go free."

"Very well," Fecci said, and turned. "Rakhud, form a scouting party of half a dozen men. Take this man with you. Make a swing around the entire position. It looks as if the French have tried to send a messenger to the village. But be sure"—he indicated Ildakeff—"that you bring him back with you."

Rakhud crawled through the grass at Ildakeff's heels, the Askari troopers in a line of skirmishers on each side. There was little sound now, and they were able to hear their own breathing. "Slow," Rakhud whispered, and caught Ildakeff by the ankle.

A man passed beyond, holding close to the ground. His movements were careful but rapid. He went in the direction of the post at a steady crawl.

"Let me get him," Ildakeff said. "It's a job I can do alone."

"Be sure you do it right," Rakhud said, and held his big, flat knife up so that the glim of the starlight came upon the blade.

All Ildakeff's discontent and bitter sense of futility concentrated as he listened to the black man's words. He broke away from the gripping clasp about his ankle, went forward almost upright. He carried his Legion rifle with the bayonet locked in place, and it was his desire to use that to kill.

But the man ahead had become aware of his approach. A grenade pin clicked. The missile gave a drumming whistle through the air. Ildakeff hurled himself down, his hands across the back of his neck.

THE explosion was violent. While the red-lashing glare of it lasted, Ildakeff saw that the man ahead was Delboit. Delboit rested on one knee, held another grenade poised.

Ildakeff fired at him from the hip. Darkness was back, the grenade flame gone. He was not sure of his aim. Then the second grenade was hurled and struck. He was flung downward onto his face, too shocked to work the rifle.

Askaris were crying out, heavily moving in pain. Carbines made a brusk crash of shots. Machine guns started in the Italian positions, others came into action from the ramparts of the post.

Ildakeff held tense. He had missed Delboit, he knew. Now Delboit would get away . . .

Blood ran from his left ear. The eardrum had been punctured by the grenade concussion. He was deafened, weak, incapable of pursuit. He lay still, his bloody head down upon his rifle breech.

Rakhud found him there. The Askari nearly tore the tunic off his back as he lifted him. "You missed?" Rakhud said.

"I missed, and he's gone. But what happened to the rest?"

"Two of them dead," Rakhud said; "the rest wounded. But it's you who will tell it to the *teniente.*"

. . . Fecci took care to hold the lighter steady as he brought it to the end of the cigarette. "I could have you shot," he told Ildakeff. "It would please me. But I propose to use you tomorrow. You and your deserter companions will be the first men I shall send into the post."

"You misjudge us," Ildakeff said thickly.

"I know you," Fecci said, "for what you are. Take him to his companions, Rakhud."

The Legionnaires hunched in a half circle. They watched Ildakeff in silence. "Talk to me," he said to them. "Explain what you think I did wrong."

"Ah, shut up!" one of them said. "You promised us plenty, and this is what we get. Open your mouth again and I'll put my boot down it. You're a liar, and a thick-skulled fool."

Ildakeff took his glance from man to man. Their eyes, their faces all held the same expression, hatred of him. He lowered prone to the ground, pretended sleep.

After a time, after they thought he was

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asleep, they talked. They had made a mistake, they said. Where they belonged was with the Legion.

VI

THE carbine bullet had gone high through Delboit's shoulder. It lamed his whole left side, sent a shock of extreme pain to his brain. But he had killed several of the Askaris, he realized, and it was possible he'd also got Ildakeff.

Now whoever remained from that patrol had returned to the Italian lines. He must keep going in order to reach the post before he bled too much or lost consciousness. Pain shouldn't stop him; his will was strong enough to overcome everything but death.

He moved in short spurts. His energy expended itself fast, and when he halted he was forced to lock his teeth over the sibilant retching of his exhaustion. It was through those faint sounds that he heard the men ahead, between him and the post.

He cleared his pistol and slid back the safety catch. But the men there were Chleuh; the nearest of them called softly to him in the mountain dialect:

"Don't shoot, *roumi*. You fight well, but we're not here to kill you. We're not your enemy—not now. Tonight, tomorrow, we watch while you and the other *roumis* with the iron machines fight. A lot of us are out here waiting. When it's over, we'll take our loot."

"*Ya l'lillah,*" Delboit murmured. "You speak like a real fighting man."

He went past them then, painfully hauling himself along the ground. They remained motionless, vague-shaped in their hooded cloaks, their rifles between their knees. He saw one he knew, the young, blond warrior who had talked with him at the *kasba* gate.

He nodded to the blond man, but got no response. They admired him as a fighter, the grim thought came to him, but they would kill him when they thought their time was right.

Beucken came down and carried him into the post. The German's hands were tender, certain on his wound. "We'll fix that quick. You'll be all right."

"I know I will," Delboit said. "But Mohal turned me down flat and his tribesmen are all through the valley. Get me a drink and some food. I've got a little problem to figure out, and if I'm not a dope it will save us."

Some of the men, Jordan and Yedich and four or five more, gathered at the door of his room while the sergeant was gone. "Did they get you bad, Lieutenant?" Jordan asked anxiously.

"Not too bad," Delboit said. "But how are you guys making out?"

Yedich shifted weight from foot to foot. "Kind of hard for us to hold this place. They've knocked off three more of our guys with their mortar and machine-gun fire."

"Things are going to be different," he said, and raised up in the bunk to be sure that all of them saw that he was grinning. "We'll give them a whipping worse than they took at Guadalajara or Caporetto. Now get back to your posts and let me chin for a bit with Beucken."

THE strong Algerian wine and the bread and sausage did him good, brought him complete lucidity. He spoke rapidly to Beucken.

"We can't stay here. I learned that when I went down the valley. We must get out somehow, and clear from here."

"You have any ideas how?" Beucken said.

"Just one. The Chleuh are wild to get their hands on the Italians' stuff. They want those Brixia mortars, and the quick-firers and the carbines. Outfit for outfit, the Italians are much better armed than we are. The Chleuh can pick up a lot more loot from them."

"That won't stop the Chleuh from taking what we've got, too."

"It will to this extent. When we quit the post, we won't be able to take much with us. The Italians will be the big prize, and what's left in the post. The Chleuh will

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make sure of the Italians before they bother us."

"But you won't leave the post so they can take it?"

"I'm going to mine this place," Delboit said, "so that when it blows, the guys inside will be pitched higher than the mountain."

"That Italian lieutenant's smart. He'll figure there's a mine here if we evacuate. If he sends in any men after we're gone, it'll only be a few."

"The mine won't be located where it'll be found right off. I plan to put it over in back of the mule shed."

"That's where our dead are buried," Beucken said, his mouth tightly drawn. "We can't mistreat our dead; we can't blow them to bits."

"Listen," Delboit said, and put his hand on Beucken's hand. "Those dead lads were real Legionnaires. They'll be serving us, will still be serving the Legion, if their graves can hide a mine that will bring us victory."

"Teufel!" Beucken said. He made a small whistling sound. "You're right, absolutely. The dead, they would be proud of that. And the Italians would never look for a mine there under the graves. The ground is freshly turned and would show no sign of our work. It would be hours, maybe, before some guy would wander over and kick it off . . . But how do we get out?"

"One by one. Through the rear wall, where the slope's so steep and rough the mechanized stuff can't operate. Fecci's certain to attack again at dawn. He knows, too, that the Chleuh are out there, and that his ammunition won't last forever. All his fancy equipment won't do him any good without his guns."

"So you and I," Beucken said, "we stay and keep up up a covering fire."

Delboit shook his head. "I figured that you were the guy to lead them. You know all the country to the south. My job's to stay here and work a couple of the machine guns until you've got the lot safe out of the valley."

Beucken grunted. "There you go," he said, "talking the same as last evening. The Legion's got to live. It's got to go on. You're the kind of guy to make it live. Sure, I know the country to the south. Years back, I was with one of the map-making expeditions that went straight through the Middle Atlas down to Mauretania and Senegal.

"I know an oasis in Mauretania that no other white man in Africa now knows exists. The native folks there are simple, quiet, peaceful. We could stay among them as long as we wanted without trouble. And, after a time, when things change in France, we could come back here—where we belong."

"All right," Delboit said, his voice slow, hoarse with emotion, "you and I stay here together until the end of the job. We leave together and take the men south to your oasis. But make a map for them just in case you and I get stuck."

"Understood, Lieutenant." Beucken stood, and it wasn't until he was fully erect that Delboit recognized there had been tears at the corners of the other's eyes. "I'll make the map and get the mine ready; I'll explain to the guys what the job is. But you catch some sleep. It won't be dawn yet for another two hours."

THE men sat on their cots in the barracks while they listened to Beucken. They looked around them, at the clothing and the packs on the wall shelves, the canteens hanging with the stoppers loose, the faded pictures and photographs of women, the paper embroidery calendar some Spanish-Jewish barkeeper at Meknes had sent Vroow for Christmas. Sighs came from them, and curses. Brabec got up absently and brushed dust off the mess table.

That action seemed comical to the others and they laughed. "But what do we do about the dogs, Sergeant?" one of the Poles asked.

Beucken touched his pistol butt. "Shoot them. We can't take them with us."

"How about the mules?" Jordan said.

"Those go with us. We'll need them for

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the wounded." Beucken's voice was flat, as if he gave ordinary orders for the day. "Brabec, you and Sedowski handle the dogs. Go feed the mules, Jordan, and get the stretchers together. I'll want you to help me with the wiring job on the mine, Yedich. The rest of you guys get up on the wall. Dump some machine gun stuff into the Italians; we won't be taking any of it with us."

"But I want to bust up the radio set," Yedich said. "Nobody from that outfit is going to get his hands on it."

"Come on!" Beucken said. "The mine will take care of the set, and any Italian within fifty yards of it."

Each of the graves behind the mule shed was marked with a headboard. The burial detail had been scrupulous, and the boards carried the Legion exploding grenade device, the famous inscription, "Fallen on the Field of Honor," the names and unit numbers, the dates of death.

"We put them back as we found them, six feet deep," Beucken said. He stood in one of the graves, carefully packing the sticks of dynamite and seventy-five gun shells. "These boys have earned their sleep."

"I wish I was with them," Yedich said. "This gives me the horrors. Look at the poor fellows."

"Think of what the Italians will look like," Beucken said, "and you'll feel better. Give me the wire before I conk you."

Vroow wandered around the barracks from bunk to bunk. He lay down on some, tried their softness. Then he went back to his own and tore from the wall a lurid color photograph of an Oulëd Nail dancing girl. "You go with me," he said, and thrust the photograph in his pocket.

A pistol shot came from the far corner of the courtyard, and a choking bark.

"They're giving it to the dogs," one of the wounded men said. "There's eleven of them, and Mistinguette was—"

"Take it easy, chum," Vroow said. "We'll breed camels down at that oasis." He took out his harmonica, began to play.

The wounded stretched back and were quiet. "You're some fun, Dutchman," the man who had spoken before said.

Jordan led the mules from the shed by their headstalls. He had curry-combed them as they watered and ate, and their hides had a smooth gloss. He was proud of them, proud of his work. They would carry the wounded safely and gently through the mountains, he knew, remembering the stories the old-timers had told him.

But it was a shame to leave this place. The stories he'd read and the movies he'd seen always had the Legion fighting to the last man.

Brabec and Sedowski came back slowly to the barracks. "You've got all the collars?" Brabec whispered.

"All," Sedowski said. "Even Mistinguette's identification tag."

Vroow met them at the door. "Time for a drink, boys," he said. "The lieutenant can't mind if we tap the keg now. What good will it be, splashed all over hell?"

The mortar shell landed in the middle of the courtyard, thrashing stone and dirt and steel. Sedowski leaned against the doorway, slid and bumped supine.

"Square through the back," Brabec muttered.

"Right," Vroow said. "But that makes another wine ration all around."

The roar of the shell awakened Delboit. He stumbled from his bunk and out into the faint gray dawn light. Another and another came over; but they were higher, ranged along the rampart. This was it, he thought. The Italian attack was coming. He pulled his whistle upward, shrilly blew.

Beucken crossed the courtyard on the trot. "Everything's ready, lieutenant. I put down about a thousand pounds of stuff, all the blasting dynamite and a bunch of the seventy-five shells and grenades. All it needs now is one guy's foot on it and off she goes."

"Fine," Delboit said. "Start the men out. Rip a hole in the rear wall big enough for them and the mules. We'll have to take a chance of the Italians finding that."

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"How do you want the men to go?"

"Straight south. They're to wait on the first ridge for half an hour. If you and I haven't reached them by then, they keep on going. Give the map to Jordan. He'll make more sense from it than some of the corporals, and the corporals would probably argue among themselves. If you need me, I'll be on the wall."

Six men of the guard remained on the wall. He sent them singly to the courtyard. "Report to Beucken," he said. "He'll tell you what to do."

They nodded, dazed and frightened by the intensity of the shell fire and went scampering down the steps.

VII

HE MOVED to a central embrasure and fed a belt into the Hotchkiss gun there. The Italian tanks were advancing, the armored cars out behind them in a secondary wave. Some of the Askaris ran in the shelter of the tanks, and they carried flame-throwers.

Fecci figures to make sure of this one, he thought. Well, it's possible. He tilted the Hotchkiss muzzle, lined the sights on a pair of the Askaris, held steady as the gun throbbed.

A great many thoughts passed through his head in the next few minutes. He wondered about his mother, whether German officers banged their heels over her smooth-waxed parquet floors. He smiled at the thought of what she would tell them, standing small and straight, the tip of her thin nose red with anger.

But then a vision of his father came to him. He remembered his father, home on leave in 1917, quoting Pétain's famous words: "We are fighting because by a cowardly withdrawal we would criminally betray both our dead and our posterity."

That was the same Pétain of 1940 and of Vichy. That was the Pétain who somewhere in his life had forgotten what it meant to be a Frenchman.

"Our dead and our posterity" . . .

Delboit put a new belt into the gun. It was hot, and the barrel had turned bluish red. But the Italians were close below the wall. Their tanks hurled with enormous shock. The wall shivered as if held by earthquake. Flame-throwers seared great orange blooms up at him and he was partly blinded. It was damn' odd, he thought. He'd killed an awful lot of guys carrying those.

Beucken lifted him bodily from the gun. "We go now."

"Where have you been?"

"Working a gun down by the gate. They're stubborn, that lot. They tried to attack there again."

"Where's the outfit?"

"Gone. I got them all out. They went the way you said, one by one, only carrying their rifles, and the Chleuh didn't bother them."

"But the Chleuh are all around the place."

"I know it. It's not their time yet. Mohal is with them, holding them back."

Masonry from the walls, beams and scraps of sheet tin from the roofs of the buildings made a jagged, confused pile of the courtyard. They went across it crouching, their heads bent as the shells burst.

Delboit looked back once, from the corner of the mule shed. The tricolor had fallen yesterday when the flag-staff had been smashed; but red, blue and white fragments of it still showed lashed to the stump. He lifted his hand to that. "Later," he said.

"Watch out," Beucken said. "Don't walk there. That's where the mine is. Keep as close as you can to the wall."

Beucken had left an automatic rifle and a case of clips by the hole in the wall. He took them in his hands, stepped quickly outside. Thick gorse bush grew on the steep slope and he pulled Delboit into it.

"Go ahead," Delboit said. "You're able to run."

His lungs ached with rawness.

"No," Beucken said, and wagged his head. "What do you think the outfit would do to me if I caught up to them without you?"

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THEY climbed from bush to bush and rock to rock on the slope. Once they came upon a khaki-clad and bloody body, beyond it found the bodies of three Askaris. "Yedich," Beucken said. "He told me he didn't want to leave his set, and that he was going to wait anyhow until you got out."

"He did all right," Delboit said, bent to pull the kepi over the smashed face.

They saw other men on the way to the ridge, Askaris and Chleuh. But the Askaris were few and far away, cautiously flanking the post. The Chleuh lay immobile among the gorse, sheepskin robes under them, highly polished cartridges in neat piles beside them.

"Every one of those guys," Delboit said, "is in a place where he can fire smack into the post."

"The only surprise for them is the mine," Beucken said. "They'll be pretty sore when they know about the mine."

Several of the Legionnaires had stationed themselves along the ridge. The first one waved his kepi to the others and the signal was rapidly repeated.

Jordan was the first man, and he had stuck fir branches through his shoulder straps for camouflage.

"Where did you find that trick, in a magazine?" Delboit asked him.

"No, sir," Jordan said. He grinned. "That's one of my own."

The main group was at the head of the rocky and winding defile of the pass that led south. Branches had been twined together to make shade for the wounded, and they lay quietly on the stolid mules. The rest of the men seemed calm, confident.

"Do we pull out, Lieutenant?" Vroow said.

"Pretty soon," Deboit said. He stared down into the valley.

The post looked like a wrecked cube of clay. Smoke from the shell explosions drifted yellow above it. The tanks and armored cars were drawn close, dim and small in the smoke.

Scarlet suddenly stabbed upward, cresting, widening. It pillared in the sky, shivered and was enveloped in vast, white-rolling billows. Sound came then; a sheer, awful detonation and wave upon wave of reverberant echo.

The mules twitched and kicked, their ears high. Squirrels squeaked in the trees, and the birds were still. The men opened their mouths to let the breath go from their stunned lungs.

"Like that," Vroow mumbled. He snapped his fingers. "Brothers and sisters, just like that."

Delboit still stared into the valley. An armored car swerved down the slope like a crazed bug. Tanks flamed, tilted on their sides, on their turrets. But there were the Chleuh yet, he thought. They must wait for the Chleuh . . .

RAKHUD came to tell Fecci that there was no more fire from the wall. "All done, *Signor teniente*. All finished."

Fecci stood behind one of the tanks. He stepped forward and went with Rakhud to the gate. Flurries of dust and smoke were across the courtyard, and bits of masonry dropped. But there was no movement or sound made by men.

"Very good," he said. "Get the Russian and the rest of the deserters and take them in. Some sort of trap may have been left here for us. You know what to do if the Russian refuses to obey."

"Signor teniente, si," Rakhud said. "I shoot him."

He hummed a little song of his Libyan homeland as he marched Ildakeff and the six others through the gate. "Walk all around," he told them. "Walk slow. Walk fast, maybe you blow up."

"I refuse to move," Ildakeff said.

"Walk!" Rakhud said, and shoved him in the back with the pistol muzzle. "You die, I'm happy."

His sense of humiliation left Ildakeff as he walked around the post with the Askari at his back. He had hated Delboit, he realized now; and the simple fact that the post was deserted and had been captured by the Italians was pleasurable to him.

He poked into the ruin of Delboit's

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room, pulled the photographs and map from the wall, filled his pockets with cigarettes. They were good cigarettes, and he lit one at once.

He scrambled over the courtyard wreckage to the barracks, laughed as he looked through the doorway. The others had gone with care into every other shed and building. "Nothing," they called to him. "Either the lice are dead or they've skipped out up the mountain."

Ildakeff turned to Rakhud. "Go tell your lieutenant that there's nothing here. But he'd better take a look out back and up on the mountain."

He walked on to the mule shed after the Askari had left him. The mules were gone, he saw, and that was a sign that maybe a few of the lot had been able to get away safe.

But the cemetery was right here in back. Their crack-pot Legion style was to bury each stiff, inscribe his name and number on the headboard of the grave. Maybe Delboit was among them there, or old, stupid Beucken.

The shells had not touched the cemetery. Shrapnel and fragmentations had ripped the wall beyond, but the rows of headboards were intact. He stooped to read the names. Behind him, the Italians were coming through the gate, and he heard Fecci calling for him.

It wouldn't be like this much longer, he thought. If he could get away from Delboit, he could get away from the Italian. He took the stub of Delboit's cigarette from his mouth, dropped it into the soft earth, then stamped on it.

He felt the rumble, the heave under him; but he had no time to move, to know that what he felt was death.

THE robes of the Chleuh rucked about their knees as they ran down the slopes. Their silvered rifle stocks took a keen glint from the sun. Delboit could see them, kneeling to fire, rising again, then walking forward to where the last of the Askaris stood.

He did not look any more after that. The post and the valley were silent. There was no further use for steel except the knives of the old women from the village. This was victory, and he had won it, but it had a sour taste.

He made a signal with his hand to the men of the Legion. "South," he said.

Vroow got out his harmonica when they were down the mountain, out in the broad plain of the next valley. He played a song and the rest sang it. It was *Aux Legionnaires*. Their voices rose strong over the tawny meadows:

Quand on a bouffé son pognon,
Ou brisé par un coup d' cochon,
Tout' sa carriere,
On prend ses souliers sur son dos,
Et on file au fond d'un paqu'bot
Aux Legionnaires.

They went south now, Delboit thought; but there would be a day when they, the Legion, came north and home.

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Caused by Tired Kidneys

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys — and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

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MEN of DA
by STOOKIE ALLEN
CATCHER!
HE CAUGHT OUTLAWS WITH HIS TRUSTY SIX-GUN AND WOLVES WITH HIS BARE HANDS.'
"CATCH-'EM ALIVE" ABERNATHY THEY CALL HIM IN OKLAHOMA. JACK ESTIMATES HE HAS CAUGHT MORE THAN 1,000 WOLVES.'
JACK ABERNATHY (AT 64)
NOTE... JACK HAS GONE MODERN BY TRADING HIS SIX-GUN FOR AN AUTOMATIC.
HE EARNED HIS NICKNAME AT 16! IN ATTEMPTING TO SAVE HIS DOG FROM A WOLF HE DISCOVERED THE KNACK OF CAPTURING THEM. A FLICK OF THE WRIST, A PRESSURE ON THE UNDERJAW AND HE HAD 'EM.'
IN 1906, "TEDDY" ROOSEVELT, VISITING OKLAHOMA, SAW JACK DO HIS WOLF CATCHING ACT AND WAS SO IMPRESSED HE APPOINTED THE WOLF CATCHER A U.S. MARSHAL.'
HE WAS ONE OF THE BEST. THEY STILL TELL OF THE TIME HE WALKED UNARMED INTO THE CAMP OF 3 OUTLAWS TO PERSUADE THEM TO SURRENDER....
...TWO OF THEM STARTED TO SHOOT HIM DOWN BUT "RED" BUCK, THE LEADER, WOULD HAVE NONE OF IT. "JACK'S TOO GOOD A MAN TO DIE LIKE THAT," HE SAID, AND LET HIM GO. IN THE RUNNING BATTLE THAT FOLLOWED, ABERNATHY ACCOUNTED FOR THE TWO THAT THREW DOWN ON HIM."

A True Story in Pictures

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That was a putt, all right; and the fate of many a man has hung on less

Someone Always Gets Hot

By JUDSON P. PHILIPS

Author of "Touchdown, Professor!," "Grand National," etc.

Sportswriters called him the Thoughtful Swede; he played golf by calculus and slide rule. Came a match when his job and his girl depended on his winning, and the Swede forgot to think

BILL CRAIG looked at Lisa and felt acute nostalgia for what he laughingly called his lost youth. She was so young, and fresh, and serious, and naive, and nuts! Her golden hair was bobbed shoulder-length; her eyes were a grave blue; her upturned nose wrinkled slightly as she stared out at the Green Mountains, hazy in the heat of the late June afternoon.

"The point is," she said, "I mean, how do you get a man to propose who insists that he has to get your father's permission first and then has to have on his striped trousers and cutaway before he will ask you?"

Bill took a swig of his scotch and soda. "I have never wanted to ask a man to propose to me," Bill said. " 'Fraid I can't help you, baby."

Lisa gave him a disapproving look. "I always used to laugh when older people made jokes that weren't funny, Bill, but I don't think that is necessary any longer between us since you seem to consider me an equal!"

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"That is pure conceit," said Bill. "Who said I considered you an equal?"

"The way you were dancing with me last night at the hotel I did not get the impression that you still thought of me as a little girl," Lisa said.

Bill winced. "All right, officer, I'll go quietly."

"Because this is a serious problem and if you are not prepared to be serious about helping me then I don't think I should talk about it to you."

Bill said: "Well, why doesn't he ask your father and get out his cutaway?"

"Because as you know very well Father is in Europe and I was certain if I could get Don alone he wouldn't be able to help asking me and then all these business complications come up."

"Suppose," said Bill, "you start over again . . . and in English."

"Mr. Garret is here."

"Who is Mr. Garret?"

"Really Bill, you are terribly stupid for a man who is thirty-five years of age. Mr. Garret is the man Don hopes to get a job with and his whole future depends on creating the proper impression with Mr. Garret."

"Well, then all he has to do is impress him!"

"That's all very well to say."

"Anyway," Bill said, "I thought your young Mr. Hanson was here to win the Intercollegiate Golf Championship."

"He is," Lisa said, "and that's the trouble because Mr. Garret doesn't understand anything about golf. His doctor sent him up here for a rest and there isn't anything to do here but play golf and Mr. Garret thinks it is silly and besides he thinks he is a great judge of men."

"I don't get it," said Bill. "He thinks golf is silly; he thinks he is a great judge of men; and that is too bad for your boy friend. Would you like to clarify that, toots?"

"Well, it is perfectly simple because Mr. Garret hasn't anything to do but watch Don and he thinks by seeing him play golf he'll find out what kind of an executive he'll make and he's always popping up from behind a bunker or coughing when Don is making a shot or muttering to himself which of course makes Don very nervous and Don thinks if he doesn't do well Mr. Garret will give up on him because he doesn't understand how difficult golf is."

"Sold, to the American Tobacco Company," Bill said.

"Mr. Garret is just a *snoop!*" Lisa said, ignoring the crack. "Naturally it makes Don jittery when so much depends on it and he can't get his mind on anything else and so how am I going to get him to propose to me with things the way they are?"

"Has it occurred to you that it might be better to let your Mr. Hanson settle one problem at a time?"

"Don't be so stupid, Bill. Because anyone knows that marriage and having a home . . . and things . . . is the most important problem you have to settle in your whole life."

"Getting a job so you can feed the wife . . . and things," said Bill, "seems fairly important, too."

"Which shows how much you know about human problems and human emotions," Lisa said.

A YOUNG man walked off the eighteenth green and came slowly across to the porch of the Ekwanok Club where Lisa and Bill Craig were sitting. He was a husky youth. His broad shoulders had an academic stoop to them, and as he approached he took off his gold-rimmed spectacles and wiped them carefully on a clean handkerchief.

"Don't tell me," Bill Craig whispered, *"that's* your Mr. Hanson?"

"Yes, and isn't he simply adorable the way he's so *serious* and I think glasses make a man look so *adult* don't you, Bill?"

Don Hanson came over to the table. He looked tired. "Well, that's that. Last practice round before the big show." His smile was forced.

"Oh Don, I'm sure you were wonderful

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and I want you to meet Bill Craig who is an old friend of the family and who used to be quite a good golfer himself when he was younger and I. . . ."

"Younger!" Bill snorted.

"I've been talking to Bill about your problem with Mr. Garret," Lisa said, "and Bill is a member of the tournament committee here at Ekwanok and maybe he can bar Mr. Garret from the course or something and then you won't have to worry about him."

Don Hanson sat down. "I guess he couldn't do that, Lisa," he said. He looked at Bill. "He's always around somewhere, watching me with that deadpan face of his. It's like being under a microscope."

"I think a drink is indicated," Bill said.

"Coca-cola for me," Don said. "I never drink during a tournament." From his hip pocket he took a small black notebook and made an entry in it with a stubby golf pencil.

Bill Craig's eyes widened. "Say, Hanson, are you the guy the sportswriters call the Thoughtful Swede?"

Don looked embarrassed. "I guess I am," he said. "You see, I feel that experience, carefully recorded and analyzed, stands you in better stead on the golf course than snap judgments. So I keep a record of how I play each hole . . . the variations created by the wind . . . the inconsistencies in the greens I don't like to leave anything to chance, Mr. Craig."

"Isn't it wonderful, Bill, for a man to have a scientific approach to a game which everyone knows is terribly scientific but haven't the mental equipment like Don to play it that way?" Lisa said.

Bill swallowed hard. "It is certainly one way of going about it."

"There is less margin for error," Don explained, simply.

Lisa said: "Don, you'd better get your shower and into some dry clothes and then I'll drive you back to the hotel because there is going to be a dance there tonight."

"Dance?" The Swede looked startled.

"Yes a dance and there is a full moon and afterward everybody is going to drive up to the pond where there is going to be some sort of a picnic or something and I am simply *too* excited."

"But . . . but Lisa! Tomorrow is the qualifying round. I . . . I have to get a good ten hours sleep if I am to be in any kind of shape" He looked helplessly at Bill.

"I'll take Lisa off your hands after you have to turn in, Hanson," Bill said.

"Gee, Mr. Craig, I'd be terribly grateful." Hanson stood up. "I'll get my shower and be with you right away, Lisa."

Lisa stamped a foot as Don headed for the locker room. "Darn you, Bill Craig, for butting in!"

"The moon was an idea, baby," Bill chuckled. "But don't forget, your man is a scientist. He probably thinks of the moon in terms of weather."

ON THE sidewalk in front of the Equinox House in Manchester are rows of rocking chairs. It is standard practice on warm June evenings for the guests of the hotel to sit in these chairs while they discuss the day's golfing.

Bill Craig sauntered out to one of the chairs at the end of the line, lit his pipe, and relaxed contentedly.

He heard a swish of taffeta as Lisa appropriated the chair next to him.

"Hi," said Bill. "What is this? Recess?"

Lisa sighed. "He's gone to bed because he has to have just the right amount of sleep and I think he's terribly sweet, don't you, Bill? I mean the way he is so serious about things. It makes you think that the way we just sort of laugh our way through life, isn't quite as worthwhile as we think."

"It may make *you* think that," said Bill.

"He's the kind of a man, Bill, who makes a girl feel secure because you just know that he will have thought out all the possibilities in a situation."

"You'd better not count too heavily on his winning this tournament and getting his job from Mr. Garret. I've been talking to some of the experts and they say he hasn't got a chance."

"How can he lose," Lisa asked, "when

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he knows just exactly what to do on every shot he plays while everybody else is playing the game as if it were . . . were, well, *roulette!*"

"Seriously, baby, I don't want you to be too disappointed. Your Swede is a good golfer, a fine shotmaker, and steady as the rock of Gibraltar. If he's on his game, nobody is going to have an off day and take him. But if anybody gets hot, and somebody always does in a big tournament, it's goodbye Mr. Chips! Your friend with the scientific approach is finished. He can't raise his own game to heights because he plays according to that little black book."

"That's silly, Bill, because after all, science is science."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you, baby. Now do we go to that dance and picnic?"

"I am terribly sorry, Bill, to disappoint you but I am going to bed because I have to be up at six-thirty."

"Six-thirty! In Heaven's name why?"

"Because Don is starting in the qualifying round at nine-seventeen and he has to have at least two hours to digest his breakfast so that his nerves will be steady and I promised to get up because it will be very lonely in Manchester at that hour of the morning."

"I haven't a doubt of it!"

"And they say seeing the sun rise over the mountains is terribly awe-inspiring and makes a man think of the most serious and important things in his life."

"The sun rises at four-thirty," Bill pointed out.

Lisa looked at him coldly. "Goodnight, Bill, and maybe if you took things a little more seriously yourself you might amount to something instead of just being a sort of perpetual *bar-fly!*"

THE Equinox House is a tomb at seven in the morning. Only the clerk and a handful of colored bellboys saw Lisa and Don Hanson go out the front entrance.

They drove to Manchester Center for breakfast at the Quality Restaurant. The Swede had orange juice, cereal, boiled eggs, dry toast and milk. Lisa confined herself to lemon juice, toast melba, and black coffee.

"Perhaps you ought to eat something more substantial if you plan to follow me around," Don said. "Or maybe you've decided not to."

"Of course I'm going to follow you because you've got to have *somebody* rooting for you with that Mr. Garret tagging along and I never eat any more breakfast than this because after all a girl has to watch her figure."

"Gee," said the Swede, "I should think you could put on a little weight and nobody would notice it."

"Don't you like my figure, Don?"

"It's swell, Lisa. Just about the nicest figure I ever saw. But you've got to have a certain number of vitamins or your energy decreases."

"Darn my energy! The important thing is for a girl to look attractive for the man she's crazy about, don't you think, Don?"

"I suppose it is," he said. He finished his milk. "I don't want to rush you, Lisa, but I'd like to get to the clubhouse because I usually lie down for about a half hour so that my digestive processes have a chance to work, undisturbed."

A few moments later the Swede parked his car behind the club house.

"Isn't it beautiful!" Lisa cried. "The dew on the grass looks like jewels, don't you think, Don?"

He scowled. "I hope they get it swept off the greens, otherwise they'll be pretty slow."

"Don, I think the early morning is sort of awe-inspiring. I mean it makes you think how *big* everything is and of the more *serious* things in your life like your work and your home and well the person you're fond of and. . . ."

"I'm afraid I'll have to go in, Lisa," Don said, glancing at his wristwatch. "If I don't get the proper amount of relaxation I don't coordinate."

AT A few minutes past nine Bill Craig sauntered out to the first tee. The Swede came over from the practice lot

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where he had worked out with his caddy. As he approached the tee his blond head was bent over his notebook.

Bill spotted Lisa and walked over to her. "If it isn't the early bird!" he said. "I shall not, however, carry on with the analogy."

Lisa sniffed.

The Swede lifted his gaze to the flagpole by the clubhouse to make certain of the wind. Something seemed to happen to him. His fingers tightened round the notebook and his eyes fixed on a solitary figure to the right of the tee. Mr. Grenville Garret, equipped with a folding golf seat, was waiting for the Swede to start. He was a gray, wiry little man, with a lobster-red face.

"I'm going to follow every step of the way with Don," Lisa said, "and if Mr. Garret does anything unfair to make Don nervous I shall have him disbarred or whatever you do."

"How can he get nervous when he knows exactly what to do?" Bill asked. "He's got all the facts of life there in his book."

"Man is not a machine!" said Lisa.

"Exactly my contention."

"Sometimes I don't know why I have ever liked you for a single minute, Bill Craig."

Bently drove first, catching the rough to the right of the fairway. The Swede then teed his ball, wiped off his spectacles, lined up his shot, and with an effortless swing, split the middle of the fairway. Lisa joined violently in the patter of applause.

As the two players went down the slope to the fairway Mr. Grenville Garret picked up his folding seat and started after them with a kind of grim determination.

"You're still going to put the hex on the old boy?" Bill asked Lisa. "You can see quite a lot of golf just hanging around the clubhouse."

Lisa was distant. "I would be less than a friend to Don if I deserted him now and you can do what you please."

"It's your headache," Bill said, "only for Pete's sake stay off the greens with those high heels if you don't want to get shot."

She looked through him.

THE newspapers the next day gave only a stick of space to Mr. Donald Hanson of Amherst. "Among the players who experienced difficulty in the qualifying round was Don Hanson, the Thoughtful Swede from Amherst, who was one of the pre-tournament favorites. Finishing with a disastrous eight on the home hole Hanson carded a mediocre 83 which just did squeeze him into the championship flight by a stroke."

This told none of the story.

It was about twelve-thirty when John, Ekwanok's bald-headed locker man informed Bill that Hanson was teeing off on the eighteenth. Bill sauntered out to the home green and, looking down the fairway, saw the Swede standing knee-deep in rough, hand shading his eyes as he studied the shot confronting him.

Lisa, looking bedraggled and walking with a magnificent limp, and Mr. Grenville Garret, squatting on his golf seat about ten yards away from the Swede, were the sum total of spectators.

The Swede consulted his black notebook and selected an iron. The ball came up toward the green, fading slightly, and plunked into the guarding trap.

This trap has broken stouter hearts than the Swede's.

It is deep, and between it and the green are a collection of high mounds, covered with wire-grass. Hanson, Bently, their two caddies, and the gallery came trudging up the hill. Bill saw that the Swede's face looked white and pinched.

Mr. Grenville Garret walked over to the trap and looked down at the Swede's ball. He shook his head dolefully, moved about ten feet away and sat down on his folding seat, his eyes fixed on the Swede.

A wave of pity swept over Bill. This really was putting on the heat.

The Swede took a sand-wedge from his caddy, looked over his ball and the line to the cup, and descended into the trap. He swung; a cloud of sand filled the air.

He looked anxiously at the green. No ball. He looked down into the trap again and his shoulders drooped.

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Again he addressed his ball; again he swung; again there was a cloud of dust and the anxious peering toward the green. Result, negative.

Fingers clutched Bill's arm. He looked down at Lisa. Her nose was a bright pink from the sun; wisps of hair had escaped from under her hat, her face was woebegone.

"Oh Bill," she choked.

"Bad round?"

"Oh Bill, it's been terrible and that Mr. Garret. . . .!"

There was a groan from the crowd around the green. The Swede had swung again. This time the ball had popped into view for an instant, struck the top of the grass mound, and trickled back into the sand.

The Swede's face was tragic.

He took off his glasses and wiped away the film of sweat. He addressed his ball once more, swung, and this time it came out, dropping about five yards short of the green. But some of Hanson's nerve was still left.

He played a deft chip to within eighteen inches of the cup and holed the putt.

The Swede fought his way blindly through the crowd to the scoreboard. Eighty-three! At that moment it seemed doubtful it would make the championship flight.

Lisa had dropped on the grass beside the home green.

"Ooh my feet!"

"Those fine, sturdy walking shoes," said Bill, looking at the spike heels on her open work sandals. "What happened to our man of science?"

"Sabotage!" she wailed. "Oh Bill, it was terrible the way that Mr. Garret followed him and never got more than about ten yards away and on the sixth while Don was putting Mr. Garret had a fit of coughing and Don took four putts and it started him going badly and Mr. Garret is deliberately trying to unnerve him just to see if he can be a good executive and if he doesn't qualify . . ."

. . . The agony of waiting for the payoff was old stuff to Bill, but he sensed its drama.

A half a dozen other boys besides the Swede hung around the scoreboard all afternoon, watching the qualifiers come in. With each score posted under eighty-three, the Swede's chances grew slimmer. He and his fellow sufferers pretended not to care; they wore frozen smiles on their faces.

Bill encountered the Swede on one of his excursions to the board.

"Tough luck, Don," he said. "But I think you're safe enough from the way they're coming in."

"I hope you're right," said the Swede. He shook his head. "I guess with so much at stake your concentration goes haywire. It's always been a game before. But this!"

BILL had dinner at the hotel that night with Lisa and the Swede. It was a gloomy affair. The Swede kept mumbling about his lack of coordination; the fact that he was getting his hands in ahead of the point of impact. That he had definitely qualified in the select circle did not cheer him. He was thinking of tomorrow.

Bill had some difficulty in keeping a straight face as he watched Lisa.

She would try deftly to steer the conversation away from golf. She pointed out young couples in the dining room who looked married and happy. She spoke vaguely about a book of recipes her mother had given her for a birthday present. The Swede was not to be drawn out of his gloom.

In the middle of dinner he went out to the front office to see if the starting times had been posted.

"I've got to hand it to you," Bill said to Lisa, when they were alone. "You're in there pitching!"

"Oh Bill, if I could just get him to think about *me* for five minutes!"

"It might be a little hard to take," said Bill. "When that young man gets his mind on something he gets his mind on it."

"Bill, I think you're horrid; and isn't that just what a girl wants?"

"Maybe he should have started a notebook on Garret before he tried to impress him," Bill suggested.

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Lisa regarded him coldly. "I think the cynicism of older people is very depressing," she said.

. . . The auction pool was held in the basement taproom of the Equinox House that night. The Swede and Lisa, along with a couple of hundred other people sat around the room while Bill Craig acted as auctioneer.

The principle of a player pool is quite simple. The qualifiers are auctioned off to bidders in the audience, the money going into the pool. The owner of the winning player collects fifty percent of the pool; the owner of the runner up collects thirty percent; and the owners of the two defeated semi-finalists collect ten percent each.

Manchester's summer crowd was in a spending mood. Bill managed to extract anywhere from fifty to six hundred dollars for the first ten players he auctioned off.

Finally he came to one Patrick O'Rourk of Holy Cross, who had burned up the course that afternoon with a brilliant 69 The bidding was fast and furious on master O'Rourk and he finally went for $850.

O'Rourk was the plum of the evening, and after his sale a number of people in the audience began to drift away toward the bar. It was then that Bill Craig became sentimental. He could see Lisa and the Swede sitting huddled on one of the back rows of seats. And he saw Mr. Granville Garret, red-faced, austere, not far away.

"Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen," Bill said. "I have one more player to auction before we turn to the field. This player had a bad qualifying round this afternoon, but he is one of the finest shotmakers in the field. I refer, of course, to Donald Hanson of Amherst. To give you an idea of what I think of his chances, I am going to open the auction with a personal bid of two hundred dollars!"

A murmur ran over the crowd. Support from Bill Craig, former champion and member of the committee, added considerable interest.

"I don't mind warning prospective bidders that he is in the same bracket with Patrick O'Rourk, who has just sold for eight-fifty. These two lads are almost certain to meet in the semi-finals, and I'm taking the dark horse."

THERE was a hurried consultation among members of a dinnercoated group in one corner of the room which had syndicated to buy O'Rourk. If they could get Hanson reasonably cheaply it would be insurance on their bet.

"Two and a quarter," their spokesman announced.

"Two-fifty," said Bill. "And Craig is a Scotch name, gentlemen."

"Two seventy-five."

"Three hundred," Bill said, cheerfully. He looked down at Lisa and winked. Then he saw the Swede's face. It was the color of old blotting paper. Suddenly Don got up and beat a hasty retreat, leaving Lisa alone.

"Three-fifty," said the syndicate spokesman.

Bill hesitated. After all, sentiment could go a bit too far. From the look in the syndicate bidder's eyes Bill decided he could stand one more raise.

"Four hundred dollars," Bill said.

"Four-fifty," said the syndicate bidder, but with an air of finality.

Bill decided he'd had enough. Four-fifty was a very respectable bid. It should make Mr. Grenville Garrett realize the Swede was well thought of.

"I have four-fifty," Bill said. "Will anyone make it five? I have four-fifty! He's cheap at the price, ladies and gentlemen. If there are to be any upsets, look for the Thoughtful Swede to bring them about. Four-fifty! Do I hear five? Do I hear five?"

And then a strange thing happened. Mr. Grenville Garret suddenly leaped from his chair, his right hand raised.

"EEE-YOW!" shouted Mr. Grenville Garret.

"Thank *you!* I have five hundred dollars?" Bill glanced at the syndicate players. The spokesman shook his head. "I have five hundred dollars. Going for five hundred once! Going for five hundred

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twice! *Sold!* To Mr. Grenville Garret, for five hundred smackers."

Mr. Grenville Garret's face was now the color of the grandfather of all boiled lobsters. He was staring wildly about him, murder in his slate-blue eyes.

At that inopportune moment, the Swede reappeared at Lisa's side. Mr. Grenville Garret pounced on him.

"Young man, I have just been coerced and tricked into investing five hundred dollars on your chances! So help me, if I thought you had anything to do with it I'd break your neck, right here and now!"

"Tricked!" the Swede stammered. "But Mr. Garret . . ."

"I don't know who is responsible for this conspiracy," fumed Mr. Garret, "but if I find out, they'll wish they'd never been born."

With a baleful glance at Lisa, Mr. Garret stormed out of the room.

"Excuse me," Don moaned. "I think I—I'm going to be ill!"

Bill Craig had come down the room to Lisa's side. "What's eating him?" he demanded. "Conspiracy! What got into the old goat!"

Lisa's hand was trembling as she rested it on Bill's sleeve. "Oh Bill, I only thought if Mr. Garret had some money on Don he'd stop trying to sabotage him and root for him instead and then maybe Don wouldn't worry so much about his golf game and get around to thinking about me."

"Lisa! What are you talking about? What did you have to do with Garret bidding that five hundred dollars?"

Lisa looked up at him. Her voice sounded small and far away. "I was holding my corsage in my hand and there *is* a pin in it and it *may* have . . ."

"Uncle!" said Bill Craig.

SOMEHOW the Swede got through his two matches the next day, and Bill Craig breathed a little easier. It brought Hanson into the semi-finals against the blazing O'Rourk, which would certainly be his Waterloo. But the pool had run to about three thousand dollars, and with the Swede a semi-finalist Garret would retrieve ten percent, or about three hundred.

The Wall Street man had followed the Swede in his two matches, grim and silent. The Swede had played atrocious golf, but his opponents had been even more jittery.

"It looks as if your boy friend had saved at least part of his hide," Bill said to Lisa. She was waiting for the Swede to emerge from the locker room.

"It is all very well for you to be cheerful, Bill Craig, because it is not your problem, but Don is going to play that O'Rourk person tomorrow and he is bound to lose and then he will pack up and leave because he will think he hasn't the right to say anything to *me*."

"Cheer up," said Bill. "Maybe he'll take O'Rourk. What that young man needs is to break training. That's what professional athletes do when they go stale."

Lisa was thoughtful. "Do you think he might beat O'Rourk?"

"Well, no," Bill admitted. "Not unless O'Rourk breaks a leg." Then he looked frightened. "But for God's sake don't work on that idea, Lisa. I mean, I wouldn't put it past you."

Bill had no premonition of climax when he walked into the Cascades for dinner that night. A dance band was playing, and several couples were out on the floor.

The first familiar face Bill saw was that of Mr. Grenville Garret. The financier was sitting alone at a corner table, and there was a look of disapproval on his angular face.

Then Bill saw the cause of it and nearly swooned.

Across the room from Mr. Garret were Lisa and the Swede—the Swede, who according to his regular schedule should at this moment be preparing for bed and for his big match with O'Rourk.

But this was not the shy, serious young golfer with the scientific approach and the weight of the world on his shoulders. His glasses were missing. This made him peer slightly, and completed the picture of a young gentleman very drunk indeed.

He was arguing with a waiter as Bill

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spotted him. His object seemed to be to get to his feet. The waiter and Lisa were both arguing him to give up the idea.

As Bill watched, fascinated, they lost and the Swede rose, weaving slightly.

The Swede drew a bead on Mr. Grenville Garret and started across the room. His stride was that of a man who imagines himself purposeful, his course was much more like a boat's, tacking into the wind. He arrived at Garret's table, stood over him.

"Mr. Garret," said the Swede, loudly and distinctly, "you are a snoop!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Mr. Grenville Garret.

"In addition to that, you are a saboturge —er—a—sabo . . . Oh the hell with it; You pull things down!"

Garret stood up. "I think I have had enough of this, young man!"

"You haven't heard anything yet," said the Swede. "You're the bogey man of Wall Street! Got a finger in everyone's pie . . . try to run everyone's life . . . crack the whip over your *em-ploy-eees!* Everybody's 'fraid to use their 'nitiative! Man is not a machine!"

Bill listened, awed. Lisa's very words!

"I wouldn't work for you if you were the las' man on earth!" continued the Swede. "Unless . . . *unless,* mind you . . . you kept your nose clean. Which you won't. You couldn't. Positively couldn't. Born snoop. Some day there will be a revolution in which all the born snoops will be taken care of. And mind you, I'm not asking you, Mr. Grenville Garret—I'm *telling* you!"

With which the Swede fell flat on his face and lay still.

GARRET looked at him without emotion. "Waiter, move my things to another table," he said, and walked away.

Bill and Lisa reached the Swede at the same time. Two waiters had picked up the body and were carrying it out.

"Well, baby, you've certainly fixed things for your pal!" Bill said. "How on earth did you ever happen to let him get drunk? Boy, is he through with Garret . . . *and* with this golf tournament!"

Lisa's lips were unsteady. "Oh Bill, everything always goes so wrong for me because I was only trying to work things out unselfishly."

"Unselfishly!"

"Well, I knew Don would never ask me while he had this tournament on his mind and so I decided the only thing to do was to make certain that he'd win it."

"Make certain of *what?*"

"But Bill, you said that when a professional athlete went stale that he broke training and took a few drinks . . ."

"A *few* drinks! That guy must have taken on a distillery all by himself."

"I thought if he relaxed that maybe tomorrow. . . ."

"Baby, you'd better not think about tomorrow! Tomorrow strong men are going to weep when the Thoughtful Swede tackles Mr. Patrick O'Rourk. A refined word for what would happen is 'murder'."

. . . The Swede sat before his untouched breakfast at the Quality Restaurant, his face buried in his hands.

"Did I say *that* to Mr. Garret?" he asked Lisa, who sat across from him.

"Yes, and you told him there was going to be a revolution which would take care of all snoops like him and that you wouldn't work for him unless he kept his nose clean and . . ."

"I don't want to know any more!"

"You'd better eat your breakfast, Don, because we are so late this morning there is going to be practically no time for you to rest your digestive processes."

"Food!" the Swede moaned. He looked at Lisa with tragic eyes. "Do you realize what this means, Lisa? Do you realize I've ruined myself? Do you realize that in less than an hour I'm to play O'Rourk of Holy Cross who's hotter than a skunk? Do you realize I can't even bend over?"

"But you've got to eat some breakfast Don!"

"Do you realize," and the Swede's voice rose dramatically, "that somewhere in the shuffle last night I lost my notebook? That I'm helpless without it? Oh, Lisa, if only you hadn't persuaded me to relax!"

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GILL CRAIG watched the Swede walk out to the first tee. Bill, who was pretty hardboiled about sports, felt sorry for the boy. Hanson looked like a man walking on egg shells.

It was just then that Mr. Grenville Garret pushed his way through the gallery and headed for the Swede. Don took one look at his would-be employer and made for the roped off area where he was safe from attack.

Mr. Garret, halted by the ropes, stared at him angrily. "Damned young fool!" he muttered.

Bill, who had eased forward so that he was at the financier's elbow said: "You're certainly thirsting for blood, Garret. I believe you're going to enjoy seeing him lose."

Garret glowered. "I had something to say to that young idiot," he said, "but if he insists on acting like a frightened rabbit . . ."

"Why not let the kid die alone and in peace?" Bill said.

"Humph!" said Mr. Garret.

"Quiet please! Mr. Michael O'Rourk of Holy Cross on the tee!"

O'Rourk, dark, wiry, confident, teed his ball and drove, a tremendous wallop down over the right hand rough which hooked neatly onto the fairway.

"Mr. Donald Hanson on the tee. Quiet! Quiet, please!" There had been a murmur of subdued voices as the Swede teed his ball. As he straightened up he actually staggered.

This *was* murder, Bill told himself.

The Swede looked at Lisa, and his lips seemed to move in silent prayer. Then quickly, without his usual studious approach, he stepped up to the ball and slugged it. It was long . . . it was wide. A fore caddy hurried over into the deep grass to the right and stood by the ball.

Mr. Garret folded his seat and started after the players. Lisa walked beside him. A handful of spectators trailed after them. Bill turned and headed for the club house.

"It is not my custom to drink at this hour of the morning," he told John, the locker man, "but I am getting sentimental. Some things are too coldblooded . . . even for me."

"MR. CRAIG!" Joe, the caddy master, was standing in the locker-room door.

"Hi, Joseph."

"We've just had a report on the O'Rourk-Hanson match," Joe said. "O'Rourk was two under par to the turn."

"There is no mercy," said Bill.

"And he is two down," said Joe.

"What?"

"Hanson's all over the course, they say, but he's making miraculous recoveries. He was out in 31."

"Great, jumping. . . ."

Breathing hard, Bill reached the knoll which overlooks the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth holes. The gallery was large now . . . large and excited.

The Swede was just putting out on the short eleventh. With his own eyes Bill saw a curling, twenty-five footer drop plunk into the bottom of the can. A birdie two. Hanson was three up, with only seven to go.

Bill elbowed his way toward Lisa, who looked like a person in a trance. "What's got into him?" Bill demanded.

"You were the one who said that somebody always gets hot, Bill, and I guess you were right about breaking training only maybe Don has to break it more than some people."

The gallery, moving for position, pushed them apart.

The Swede, looking wild-eyed, sprayed one off the twelfth tee. Bill, following on his heels, saw the Swede's lie.

The ball rested squarely in the midde of a small, scrub-pine bush. The Swede did not hesitate. He took some kind of iron from his bag, cut savagely at the ball, and Bill saw it rise, arch gracefully over a protecting trap and land eight feet from the cup.

The Swede trudged on.

Someone grabbed Bill's arm. He looked into the perspiring face of Mr. Grenville Garret. The magnate's eyes were bright with excitement.

"Wouldn't have believed it," he said,

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"but this is thrilling. That Hanson kid . . . resourceful. Plenty of guts. Playing without that infernal notebook of his, you know."

"He's *what?*"

"Playing without all his blasted notes. Going all out! Sign of resourcefulness."

The Swede missed his birdie on the twelfth but he got a half.

On the thirteenth tee Mr. Garret sat himself directly down in the Swede's line of vision. The Swede seemed not to see him. He played a driving iron on that difficult one-shotter and left himself a short putt.

O'Rourk cracked. His drive caught a trap and he took four, leaving himself four down and five to play.

The fourteenth was halved and on the fifteenth the Swede closed the match out. He canned another birdie. He accepted O'Rourk's congratulations in a daze and turned toward the club house.

It was then that Mr. Grenville Garret, his folding seat tucked under his arm, came through the crowd and up to the Swede.

"I want to talk to you," he said grimly.

"Y-yes, sir."

The gallery had stampeded to watch another match. Only Lisa and Bill remained to witness the encounter.

"You were damned impertinent last night!" said Mr. Garret.

"Y-yes, sir."

"You were drunk!"

"Y-yes, sir."

"But what you said might be true!"

The Swede opened his mouth and then closed it, like a gasping fish.

"Well," growled Mr. Garret, "I don't object to a man relaxing on vacation. And here's your notebook. Tried to give it to you on the first tee. Glad I didn't succeed. Got the chance to see what you could do in a critical situation. Liked your nerve." He whirled suddenly to look at Lisa. "Young lady, you stuck a pin in me the other night."

"It was a very small pin," Lisa said, unsteadily. "I only . . ."

For the first time in three days Mr. Grenville Garret's stern mask cracked. "Owe you a debt of thanks," he said. "Looks like I stand to make a nice piece of change. Now, come on . . . all of you. I'll buy a round of drinks."

He took the Swede's arm. "Never thought much of this game," he said. "Thought it was silly . . . chasing little white balls around in the bushes. But it got me today. I could use a man like you in our organization. Chap who's the chairman of your board is always bragging about his golf game. Maybe if you took me under your wing . . ."

"Gee, Mr. Garret."

"Well, report Monday morning."

"Oh Mr. Garret," Lisa wailed, "you have no idea what a tournament takes out of a man and I think Don should have several days when he doesn't have to think about golf or business or anything except well perhaps certain emotional factors in his life."

Mr. Garret's eyes twinkled. "Make it a week from Monday," he said.

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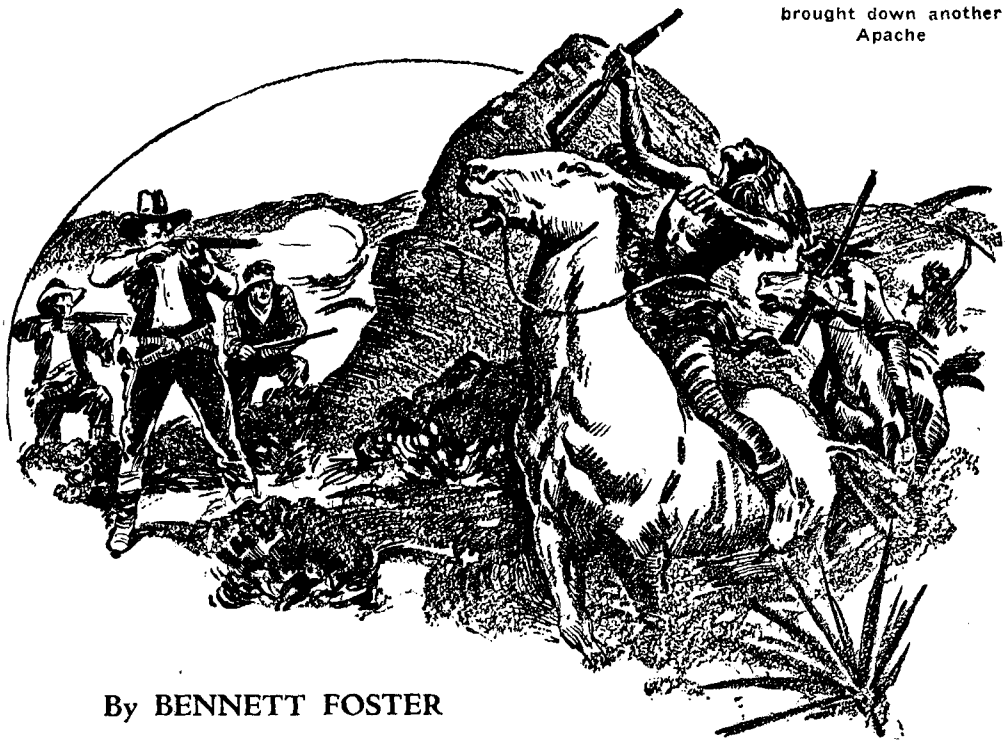

On his feet now, Dan brought down another Apache

By BENNETT FOSTER

Thunder Hoofs

A YOUNG veteran of the Civil War, DAN SHEA comes to Bendicion with the hope of settling down in that new land of the Southwest. There his first meeting is with murder, for at a stage stop outside of the town he sees a traveling companion of his shot down by three men, who escape.

SHERIFF YOUTSEY of Bendición evinces little interest in the murder. The dead man's name was MAPLES, but the bag he carried has vanished, stolen by a halfbreed; and so the case is closed. Later Youtsey does discover that Maples ran a little abstract office up at the capital.

Dan Shea's first friend in Bendición is RAND FITZPATRICK, a saloon keeper. And it is in Fitzpatrick's bar that Shea encounters an old enemy, GEORGE DELANEY. In the Wilderness Campaign only a few years before, this man deserted Dan Shea and a dying friend of his. Now George Delaney, whom Dan has sworn to kill, has established himself as a rising young lawyer in Bendicion. And soon Shea's distrust increases; he sees Delaney talking to a man whom Dan recognizes—one of Maples' killers.

DAN SHEA hopes to make his living from sheep, and his announcement of this gets him into a knock-down fight with some cowboys. But in DON MARTIN O'CONNOR of El Puerto del Sol Dan finds a friend and ally. A big, driving Irishman, O'Connor married a Spanish woman and turned the hacienda El Puerto del Sol into the greatest sheep ranch of that country. He welcomes the arrival of another Irishman, and so does his daughter, MARILLITA, who immediately fascinates Dan Shea.

Shea has it in mind to drive sheep north to Colorado, where there are new markets. But Don Martin counters this with another proposal; he asks Dan to be the *partidario* of one of his ranches. O'Connor's system is

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to let out sheep and small ranches for five years, taking a share of the profits. The semi-independent sheep-raiser is called a *partidario*, and this position Dan Shea gladly accepts. He will be master of Rancho Norte.

ESTABLISHED there, he soon encounters ESME PERRIER, a strange, courteous little man who roams the country with his horses, dogs and his servant, hunting wolves and coyotes. Perrier takes to Shea because of Dan's horsemanship and his way with dogs. Later, in his first encounter with the shearers, Dan wins the fervent loyalty of an Indian boy named VINCENTE, whom he rescues from a knife fight.

But the ancient feud between sheepman and cattleman eventually touches Rancho Norte. JESSE LOUDER, a neighboring cowman, has been shoving his stock onto Shea's range, for the animals are desperately in need of water. When Shea suggests a fair settlement of the matter, Louder refuses to make up his mind at once; and later Dan finds that the cattle have shoved across again.

WHILE Dan is herding the stock away, someone takes a shot at him, killing his horse. Indeed, Shea is nicely cornered, until Louder appears and frightens the ambusher away. Then Dan Shea learns that Louder had decided to accept his proposition about the range; that he had not ordered the cattle driven over. It develops that the ambusher was BUSTER, one of the cowboys whom Dan fought in Bendicion; and Louder summarily fires him.

Dan Shea has been urgently courting Marillita O'Connor, and with success. Now the wedding is set for fall; all El Puerto del Sol is preparing. But before fall comes Dan is suddenly faced with a battle and a mystery. He finds Martin O'Connor in a fury, gripping some papers which Sheriff Youtsey has brought him, muttering that they must fight back. So Dan's first task is to quiet the seething Irishman, and learn what lies behind his fury. . . .

CHAPTER XI

LET THE VICEROY SPEAK

THE papers that Dan Shea received from O'Connor were a complaint and a summons. Ramon de la Luz, in company with others of his clan, were seeking satisfaction from Martin O'Connor and Jesse Louder, so the complaint read.

The complaint stated that O'Connor had sold a portion of the Grant to Louder, that he had no right to make that sale for he held no title to the land; that the title was vested in a grant given to one Selberio de la Luz by Francisco Cuervo, Governor General of New Mexico, in the days when all of Mexico belonged to Spain. Ramon de la Luz and all other of Selberio's heirs prayed redress from Martin O'Connor, and were suing for that redress.

Having finished reading, Dan looked up at Martin O'Connor. "Suppose," he drawled, "that you tell me about it, Don Martin."

O'Connor, his anger ebbing before a sympathetic listener, harshly told the story. El Puerto del Sol had been given to an early Alarid by Phillip of Spain himself. The Alarids had held it. Then later, at the end of the Spanish occupancy, Cuervo, as governor general, had given land to Selberio de la Luz. Some of that land had lain across the grant of El Puerto del Sol.

The Alarids and the de la Luz had gone to court. The viceroy had appointed a judge, and when the trial was done, El Puerto del Sol belonged to the Alarids and the de la Luz grant had been changed to land along the river.

Dan listened gravely to Don Martin's tale, ignoring the angry interjections. When it was finished, Dan sat thoughtful, while Martin O'Connor watched him.

This was his battle, just as it was Don Martin's. Now Dan could feel the grip of El Puerto del Sol, now he could feel its hold upon him. He was tied, bound to the Grant. Everything that affected El Puerto affected him also. Chains held him to the place. His love for Marillita, his affection for Martin O'Connor, his stake at Rancho Norte: all these were the chains. But more than these, stronger and greater than any or all of them, was El Puerto del Sol itself. Dan Shea looked up and met Don Martin's eyes.

"There's been a settlement," he said. "We've no cause for worry. What we need is a lawyer, a good sharp man that can find the records and settle this. We'll get one, Don Martin."

"But the nerve of them la Luz!" Don

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Martin snapped. "The very nerve of them. There's always been a fight between the la Luz an' the Alarids. I've had some trouble in my time with them. An' now they bring this up, just when you an' Marillita are gettin' married an' all. I tell you, I could kill the man that—"

Dan laughed. "You'll have to go to Albuquerque to get your lawyer," he said. "Marillita told me the last time I was here that she wanted to go to the pueblo to buy some things. We'll mix business with pleasure, Don Martin, an' take the trip together."

Martin O'Connor could not help laughing with Dan. Good humor—ever close to the surface in the big man—rose up to drown his anger. "Why," said Martin O'Connor, "we can make a party of it, Dan. That's what we'll do. Let's get the girl in now an' make our plans."

DAN called Marillita into the room. The girl came hesitantly. When she saw Don Martin's face her own brightened and her trepidation vanished. O'Connor drew his daughter down up on his knee and gently pinched her firm chin with a big forefinger and thumb.

"We're goin' to Albuquerque, Dan an' me," he boomed. "Do you think now that you could look after things whilst we're gone?"

Anger glinted in Marillita's eyes. "Look after things?" she snapped. "If you and Dan go to Albuquerque and leave me here you needn't look for me when you come back. I'll—I'll—"

O'Connor's laughter boomed. "In that case mebbe we'd best take you along."

"You're trying to tease me," Marillita accused. "Father, I never thought it of you. You don't love me, either one of you."

It was the girl's turn to tease and she made the most of it, hiding her face in her hands and weeping realistically. Dan sprang up and O'Connor, alarmed, sought to placate his daughter. It was not until he saw the upturned corners of her lips that Dan realized Marillita was retaliating. Then the three sat down and planned the journey.

Nothing was said to Marillita as to the cause of O'Connor's trip. She hinted questions, but her father gave no answer. It was not until later, when they were alone, that Dan told the girl the reason. Marillita was grave.

"I was afraid that there was trouble, Dan," she said. "You'll stay with father, won't you? You won't let him do anything that he shouldn't?"

"Of course, I'll stay with him," Dan assured her. "It's just a legal matter. There's nothing to worry about, sweet."

Marillita laid her hand in Dan's. "All my life," she said, "I've seen trouble, Dan. It's only been these last few years that we've been free of it. Dan, when we're married there won't be any more trouble, will there?"

"None," Dan assured.

It seemed as though the girl did not hear that assurance. Her voice was musing. "Before I was born," she said, "when father and mother were first married, there was trouble at El Puerto del Sol. My grandfather had mortgaged the place. There were a lot of Alarids, Dan, and they all lived on the Grant. All the cousins and second cousins and aunts and uncles, and people that weren't relatives at all. And none of them were willing to help. They lived off the Grant. Can you understand that, Dan?"

Dan nodded. He had seen just that thing happen, seen parasites prey upon a place until only a husk remained.

Marillita went on. "Dad married my mother and began to get things into his own hands. He sold some land and paid part of what was owed. He bought the interests of others. Some of them he sent away. Grandfather died and my mother was the direct heir. And then I was born and my mother died. Father wanted to save the place for me. He fought for it, Dan."

Dan Shea listened in silence. He could see now why Martin O'Connor had the reputation of being a hard man, a ruthless man. It was necessary that he be hard and ruthless—to hold together the great domain that was El Puerto del Sol.

"Sometimes," Marillita said thought-

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fully, "I don't think he did it for me, or that he did it for my mother. I think he did it for El Puerto del Sol. It's kind of a religion with him, Dan.

"Ever since I was a little girl I can remember his talking to me, always talking about El Puerto del Sol and what it meant to him and what it must mean to me. He isn't like himself when somebody does something to El Puerto. He's like—" The girl paused. "He's like one of those ogres that I used to read about in fairy stories. He's—he's terrible, Dan."

The small hand that rested in Dan Shea's closed convulsively. "And he's old, Dan," the girl said. "I didn't know how old he was. He works terribly hard. And some day . . ."

"Marillita," Dan said earnestly, "you mustn't fret. You've got me now and it's my business to keep trouble from you. I'll tend to it."

Marillita lifted her hand from Dan's and her arms went about his neck. Her head against his chest, she murmured softly. "I feel so safe with you. Is it because I love you, Dan? Is it because—"

"It's because you *are* safe with me," Dan Shea said.

"What are you two talkin' about?" Martin O'Connor boomed from a doorway. "Plottin' against the old man, are you? I'll not have it. Not with me around. You'll have to take me into the plot."

Marillita lifted her head. "We were just thinking how long it is until October, Father," she answered.

LATER that day when O'Connor and Dan Shea sat talking together, Jesse Louder came to El Puerto del Sol. He rode up on a sweating horse, stopping just at the great wooden gates that were opened into the patio, and with him were two hard-faced, lanky men who sat their horses and stared into the peace of the shaded enclosure.

Louder dismounted stiffly, and came stalking forward, scowling. Behind him his two men also dismounted and moved so that they were at either side of the patio gate, lounging beside the gate posts.

Martin O'Connor and Dan waited for Louder to approach. "Good day to you, Mr. Louder," Don Martin greeted.

Louder plunged immediately into his errand. "Youtsey came to my place today," he announced. "Served these papers on me. I come to you about 'em, O'Connor."

"He was here, too," O'Connor answered. "I've had a summons."

Louder spread out the complaint and summons, "I bought that country from you in good faith," he said harshly. "From what I read here you didn't have no right to sell it. I'm goin' to hold you responsible, O'Connor, an' if you've crooked me I'll—"

"What'll you do?" Don Martin snapped. "See here, Louder . . ." O'Connor's anger was rising and his voice was hostile. It was as though two strange dogs had met and, snarling in preliminary, were ready to throw themselves at each other's throats.

"I'll—" Louder began.

"We've been talking about this, Mr. Louder," Dan interposed quietly. "I'm glad that you've come over. Don Martin and I are going to Albuquerque to hire a lawyer to look into this for us."

Louder turned his angry eyes on Dan. "So you're in it too!" he snapped. "You told me that you didn't work for O'Connor.

"I don't," Dan answered levelly, keeping his temper in check. "But I'm interested. I've got sheep on shares with him and my range comes under this suit."

"Why did they serve me?" Louder demanded, turning back to Don Martin. "I don't sabe. You sold me the land. It's up to you to make the title good."

"You'll not tell me what it's up to me to do!" O'Connor was red with his anger. "I know what I've got to do an' what I haven't. I—"

"Now wait!" Dan's calm voice cut into the tirade. "I'll tell you why you were served, Mr. Louder. You're occupying part of the land that is included in the suit. That's why you were named and that's the only reason."

"I—" Louder began angrily.

"I'm not through," Dan interrupted. "Naturally Mr. O'Connor is going to de-

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fend himself. I told you that he was going to Albuquerque to hire a lawyer."

"I'll not put out a damned cent for this," Louder announced. "An' I tell you it won't be a lawsuit with me, O'Connor. You're responsible for the whole thing and if there's trouble about it, I'll—"

"You'll do what?" Martin O'Connor shoved his face forward until it almost touched Louder's. "What'll you do?"

"In a minute," Dan interposed coolly, "you'll both say something that you'll regret later. If you'll quit trying to fight each other and cool down a little you'll find out that you both want the same things. You're acting like a couple of fool kids."

Don Martin retreated a step and glared at Don Shea. "A kid, am I?" he boomed. "I'll have you know—"

Dan's quiet eyes met those of the angry man and O'Connor lapsed into silence. Dan turned and looked at Jesse Louder.

"You want title to your land," he said calmly. "That's all you want, isn't it, Mr. Louder?"

"That's what I want," Louder growled.

"And you want him to have it, Don Martin. You want to do the fair thing. Isn't that so?"

"I've never cheated a man in my life," Martin O'Connor said. "I sold the land in good faith. I'll make the title good."

"Then what are you fighting about?" Dan asked calmly. "You both want the same thing. Why fight? Why not help each other?"

AS THOUGH the idea were totally new and strange to both of them, Martin O'Connor and Jesse Louder stared at Dan Shea.

"We're going to Albuquerque," Dan continued. "We're going to hire a lawyer and clear this up. Don Martin's told me about the whole thing. There's nothing to worry about. This title has already been adjudicated. Don Martin had a right to sell it. This suit is just someone trying to stir up trouble. I tell you, Mr. Louder, your title is good."

"You give me your word for that, Shea?" Louder demanded.

"I'll give you my word," Dan answered.

Louder pondered a moment. Then, lifting his eyes, he looked at Dan. "I'll take your word," he said bluntly. "I—I reckon I come over here half-cocked, O'Connor. I was pretty well riled up."

After a moment's pause, Don Martin accepted the apology as awkwardly as it had been tendered.

"You an' me have had some trouble before," he said. "I don't know. Guess I'd of been riled, too."

"Let's sit down and talk this out," Dan suggested.

Louder paused and then nodded to his men at the gate. One man squatted beside the gate and the other collected the bridle reins of all three horses and led them out of the opening. Dan Shea, O'Connor, and Louder walked to a bench and sat down.

"Suppose you tell Mr. Louder what you told me about this, Don Martin," Dan suggested.

O'Connor cleared his throat. "Well . . ." he began.

When Martin O'Connor's tale was done, Louder nodded. "I see," he said. "An' now you're goin' to get a lawyer an' clear this up, is that it?"

"That's it," O'Connor rumbled.

Louder turned to Dan Shea. "All right," he said grudgingly. "I guess you had the right of it. But I'll tell you both this: I'm not payin' a cent for the lawyer or for the courts."

"Nobody asked you to," O'Connor growled.

Louder stood up. Still looking at Dan, he spoke further. "You'll keep me posted?"

"I'll keep you posted," Dan assured. "It's about supper time. You—"

"I'll go back to the ranch," Louder interrupted. "I mind one time I asked you to eat with me." He grinned suddenly.

Dan returned the smile. "You'd be welcome," he announced.

Louder stood up. "Maybe I would," he replied. "I'd better go home."

Louder poised a moment, seemed about

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to say something more, and then he walked toward the gate. There his riders stood up and joined the cowman and side by side they walked out of the gate and out of sight.

When the cowmen were gone there was quiet in the patio. Then Martin O'Connor said: "Danny, in another minute I'd of hit him. He come blusterin' an' blowin' in here an'—"

"It wouldn't have done any good, Don Martin," Dan Shea interrupted. "What would you have done if you'd been in his place?"

Martin O'Connor thought that over for some time. There was a sheepish expression on his face when he answered. "The same thing, I guess."

CHAPTER XII

THE SEÑOR WILL DIE

PREPARATIONS for the trip to Albuquerque filled the next few days. It was necessary that everything be put in shape before Martin O'Connor and Dan Shea left El Puerto del Sol, that orders be given and that equipment be made ready.

Don Martin would not go by stage. He had a canvas-covered, four-wheeled rig in which he purposed to make the trip. Marillita must have an *ama*, food and clothing must be made ready. It was three days following Louder's visit before all was in readiness. On the morning of the fourth day, with Don Martin at the reins, with Marillita beside him and with a plump native woman in the back seat, the wagon rolled away from the hacienda. Dan Shea rode beside it.

Just after noon on the first day of the journey, the spring wagon rumbled across the toll bridge and on into Bendicion. Here the trip was to be broken. Dan saw Don Martin and Marillita installed at the hotel. He ate his dinner in their company and then, while Martin O'Connor went upon his own business and while Marillita set out shopping, Dan strolled down the street to Rand Fitzpatrick's saloon.

Fitzpatrick was not in. Dan stood talking with the bartender while he waited. Presently Fitzpatrick returned.

He shook hands with Dan and led him to a table in the rear of the room. Seated there, their greetings and small talk done, Fitzpatrick asked a question.

"I hear you're goin' to be married. That so?"

"That's so," Dan agreed. "In October. Fitz, will you stand up with me?"

Fitzpatrick's face showed his surprise. "Me?"

"You. There's no one I'd rather have."

A slow grin spread across Fitzpatrick's face. "Think of that now," he said. "Of course I will, Dan."

"That's settled then," Dan Shea said. "I'll let you know when, Fitz."

A silence fell between them while Fitzpatrick looked at his fingers, nervously tapping on the table top. "You had any more trouble?" he asked suddenly.

"*I've* had none," Dan answered. "But there's a suit—"

"I know about that," Fitzpatrick interrupted.

"We're on the way to Albuquerque now," Dan said. "We'll hire a lawyer and clear the thing up. I wonder why the de la Luz started it, Fitz. Have you heard anything?"

For a moment Fitzpatrick did not answer; then leaning a little further and keeping his voice lowered, he said: "It's Delaney, Dan."

"Delaney?" Dan Shea was startled.

Fitzpatrick nodded solemnly. "It's him," he repeated. "He's got hold of Ramon an' some more of the la Luz outfit. He's representing them."

Dan frowned. "But—" he began.

"You hear talk around town," Fitzpatrick interposed hastily. "Nothin' very definite, nothin' very much, but you hear talk. They're out to get O'Connor, Dan. Don Martin's rode high. He's done a lot of things. He's a big man. They aim to get him. It ain't just the la Luz outfit an' Delaney; it's a lot more than that."

Dan Shea sat quiet and Fitzpatrick leaned back. There was a bitter twist to Dan's lips, a sardonic gleam in his blue

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eyes. They were out to get Martin O'Connor, not just the de la Luz family, not just George Delaney, but the whole countryside.

Dan knew how that worked. Let some man rise up, gain power, and all the others of the pack would strive to pull him down. There might be men in Bendicion and around the town who would not lift a hand to hurt O'Connor. Neither would they lift a hand to help him.

There would be many who would delight to see Don Martin O'Connor dragged down. There would be few, if any, who would help to maintain him in his powerful position.

"I'm in this, Fitz," Dan said gently. "You knew that, didn't you?"

Fitzpatrick's shrug was eloquent. "Knowin' you, I knew that you was in it."

A moment's silence lay between the men, and then Dan spoke again. "Yes, I'm in it. All the way."

IN ALBUQUERQUE, the morning after their arrival, Dan Shea and Martin O'Connor sought out Bruno Gotleib. They found the swarthy little lawyer in his office, and after greetings and introductions had been exchanged, they plunged immediately into their business. O'Connor told the story, rumbling out the words, cursing angrily now and again.

When the tale was done, Gotleib rested a moment in thought. Then he spoke crisply.

"I'll handle the matter for you. We'll prepare an answer and file it. We may have to send to Mexico City for the records. This will be an expensive business."

O'Connor nodded. Gotleib spoke again. "Do you want me to represent Mr. Louder in this suit?"

"Yes," O'Connor answered. "But I'm payin' for the whole thing."

"Now that you've brought up the matter," Gotleib's eyes met O'Connor squarely, "you'd better give me some money for a retaining fee and for expenses."

"How much?" O'Connor asked.

Gotleib thought a moment. "A thousand dollars," he said.

"I'll get it at the bank," Don Martin announced. "Come with me, Dan."

All three men arose. "I've a little business at the bank," Gotleib said. "I'll go with you."

The three walked down to the low brick building which housed the private banking firm of Stern and Harris. Stern, the senior partner, conducted them into his private office. Before Don Martin could state his mission, Stern began at once to talk.

"We received the drafts for the wool, Mr. O'Connor," he announced. "They came in a week ago. I sent you a letter acknowledging their receipt."

"I got it," Don Martin said. "I—"

"I've some bad news for you," Stern interposed gravely. "I was served with an attachment on your account yesterday."

"What?" Martin O'Connor half rose from his chair and then sank back once more.

"Your account has been attached," Stern repeated. "I'm sorry, Mr. O'Connor."

Martin O'Connor looked blankly first at Nathan Stern and then at Dan and Gotleib. "But what's that for?" he demanded.

Stern shrugged. "I don't know," he answered. "All I know is that your account has been attached. We're forbidden to release any of it."

Anger began to show on Martin O'Connor's face. "You mean I can't have any of my money?" he rasped.

"The account has been attached," Stern repeated nervously. "I'm sorry, but we can't release any of the money until the attachment has been removed."

"Then I'll borrow!" Martin O'Connor announced. "Make out a note for a thousand dollars, Stern. I'll sign it and you can give me the money."

Stern's face twisted nervously. "I'm sorry . . ." he began.

"You'll not let me have it?" O'Connor glared at the banker. "Is that it? I've done my business with you for years an' you'll not make me a loan?"

"I'm sorry," Stern said again. "I under-

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stand that you're in legal difficulties, Mr. O'Connor. The policy of the bank . . ."

"To hell with your bank an' your policy!" Don Martin roared. "Come, men. We'll get out of this nest of cheats!"

With Stern still expostulating, Martin O'Connor jerked on his hat and stamped his way to the door. Dan Shea and Bruno Gotleib, after an exchange of glances, followed him out.

ALL the way to Gotleib's office Don Martin stalked ahead in silent fury. It was not until they were in the quiet of Gotleib's room that the dam broke. Then Don Martin cursed the bank, its partners, its root and branch, vowing that never again would he do business with Stern and Harris; that he would ruin them, that he would never forgive this indignity. There was nothing to do but to let his wrath run its course. Dan Shea and Gotleib sat and listened.

Dan Shea had shipped his wool with O'Connor. There would be no money available from that source. Yet money was needed and immediately. O'Connor cursed and raged, but Dan's mind was not on what the older man was saying. Instead, in his mind, a plan began to take form. Presently Martin O'Connor ran down, stopped, and looking from one to the other of his companions, asked a question.

"What are we goin' to do?"

"I'll prepare an answer and file it," Gotleib announced. "As far as I am concerned, Don Martin, you needn't give me any money. I'll be glad to take care of the work and the fees. But—"

"But Mr. Gotleib will be at considerable expense," Dan said easily. "It isn't fair to ask him to put his own money in jeopardy." His eyes were on the lawyer as he spoke and he could see that Gotleib was relieved.

"You've always got to consider," Dan continued, "that we might lose the suit."

Martin O'Connor glared at Dan. "Lose the suit?" he thundered. "We'll not lose it. I'll take it to the highest court in the country!"

"And all that will cost money," Dan said. "I'll tell you, Don Martin: I've some money left. We'll use that."

"Your money?" Martin O'Connor stared at Dan.

"It will do to start." Dan was unbuttoning his shirt and fumbling with the buckle of his money belt. He drew out the belt, placed it on the table and unbuckled a pocket. "There isn't much there," he said, turning to Gotleib, "but like I say, we can start with that. And Don Martin will have more. He'll have all that you need."

"But my money's in the bank an' I can't get it," O'Connor said. "The money from the wool an'—"

Dan grinned at O'Connor. "There's plenty of sheep on El Puerto del Sol," he said. "And there's a market in Colorado. Don Martin will have enough money, Mr. Gotleib."

Martin O'Connor sat down. Gotleib was smiling. "Apparently you haven't much to worry about, Don Martin," the lawyer said.

"Not while I've got Dan to do my thinkin' for me," O'Connor agreed. "I'd of sold my lambs an' wethers. I knew I could do that, but faith, I was so mad I'd forgot about it." He laughed. "Stickin' to your last, Danny," he observed, turning once more to Dan Shea. "You came to me with the idea of trailin' sheep to Colorado an' I wouldn't let you have 'em. I wanted you with me an' now you've caught me in a crack an' you'll trail the sheep after all. It's a hard-headed, stubborn lad you are."

Dan Shea was smiling. "About five thousand head will do to start with," he said. "Young ewes. I don't think we need to worry about the money, Mr. Gotleib."

Gotleib's thin hands stacked papers. "I'll go right ahead and prepare an answer," he announced. "I'll send a man to Santa Fé to search the records, and I'll see what I can do about removing this attachment though I'm afraid that won't be much. Don Martin, will you and your daughter and Mr. Shea dine with me tonight? I'd be very pleased."

Martin O'Connor nodded his shaggy head. "Aye," he answered, "we'll dine with

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you. An' I tell you right now, Gotleib, I'm keepin' Dan Shea in the family. He's goin' to marry Marillita."

THERE was some further talk with Bruno Gotleib before Dan and O'Connor were ready to leave the office. Martin O'Connor's anger still smouldered and once or twice it flared up, particularly when the attachment of his bank account was mentioned. But when finally the details were settled, the plan of action outlined, and the two men were walking back to the hotel, Martin O'Connor was silent for most of the distance. Before they reached the hotel, however, he spoke.

"I don't know what I'd do without you, Dan," he said. "You kept me from fightin' Louder. I'd of done that, for the man rubs me the wrong way. You kept me from losin' my head at the bank an' in Gotleib's office. It's a mystery to me how I got along without you before you came."

Dan laughed. "It seems to me that you did all right," he said. "You held El Puerto del Sol together and put the place on its feet before you ever heard of me."

O'Connor shook his head. "I'm gettin' along in years," he announced. "I know just one way to do things an' that's to fight an' bull 'em through.You're smart, Danny, but you'll fight. I've seen you fight."

Dan did not answer. He was staring across the street. Delaney and Ramon de la Luz were walking together on the opposite side, their heads bent as they talked. Dan Shea stopped short and O'Connor took another step and then he also stopped.

"What is it, Dan?" he asked quickly.

Delaney and Ramon had entered a building and were lost to sight. Dan controlled the anger that welled up in him and yet his voice was thick as he answered: "George Delaney, damn him!"

O'Connor—who had seen neither Delaney nor Ramon—stared curiously at his companion. Dan blurted out words. "I've as much reason to be in this as you have. This is as much my job as it is yours. Marillita—" He broke off.

"You're lookin' after her, Dan. Is that it?" Still O'Connor eyed his friend.

Dan nodded. He was looking after Marillita. That was part of it, that and his friendship for Martin O'Connor, and his own interests as Don Martin's *partidario*. But that was not all. Deep down in Dan Shea was his bitter hatred for George Delaney. Startled by the thought, he realized that regardless of Marillita or Don Martin or anything else, he would have entered this fight; entered it for the sole purpose of beating Delaney.

"Let's go to the hotel," he said abruptly.

Marillita was waiting for them in the hotel. She had shopped all morning and she was eager to show them what she had bought. While she talked Don Martin smiled fondly at his daughter, but Dan stood silent. The thought that he must destroy this pained him.

"And I bought curtains," Marillita continued happily. "Drapes for all the windows and—What is the matter, Dan?"

"I'm sorry," Dan said bluntly, "but we can't buy them now, Marillita."

"Of course, you can buy them," O'Connor boomed. "There's nothin' to keep you from—"

"Not now," Dan interrupted firmly. "Not until I come back from Colorado."

"From Colorado?" Marillita spoke her surprise. "But—"

"There's no need to go into it," O'Connor said hastily.

Dan Shea shook his head. Martin O'Connor had kept details from his daughter, had shielded Marillita. But Dan knew the stuff the girl was made of, and to him his marriage would be a partnership. What he faced, what Martin O'Connor faced, Marillita must also face.

"I'll tell you," he said brusquely. "I'll have to go to Colorado." He continued then, telling Marillita about the things that had happened during the morning, detailing the difficulties that confronted Martin O'Connor and El Puerto del Sol, outlining the plans that had been made, going over it all despite Martin O'Connor's frown of disapproval.

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"So you see," Dan concluded, "that we can't buy things now, Marillita, and that I've got to go to Colorado with the sheep. You see that, don't you?"

The girl was slow in answering. She stood with lowered eyes staring at the floor. When she lifted her head there was a smile for Dan Shea. "Of course, I see," she announced. "I'll go to the stores this afternoon and take back the things I've bought. It's all right, Dan. I'm glad you told me. You had to tell me."

Dan glanced at Martin O'Connor and then turned to the girl. "Of course I had to," he agreed.

THAT night Don Martin, Marillita, and Dan Shea dined with Bruno Gotleib. Gotleib's wife, a small, gracious woman, was a perfect hostess, and at the table there was no mention made of the errand that had brought the guests from El Puerto del Sol. It was late when they left Gotleib's house and the lawyer's carriage took them back to the hotel.

Don Martin and Marillita went to their rooms. In the morning the party would leave for the return journey. Dan Shea paid for their accommodations and then, lighting a cigar, he walked out to the porch and stood thinking, letting the cool breeze whip away the smoke.

It was odd, he thought, how he should have come to be the controlling influence in all these happenings. He had come into the country without particular destination in mind. His sole idea had been to recoup the losses he had suffered in the North. Now here he was in partnership with Martin O'Connor, engaged to marry the most desirable woman in the world, and embroiled in a fight.

As he stood there, the cigar finished and thrown away, still musing, he was aroused by a swift step on the porch. Dan turned. Light from the lobby streamed through a window and Ramon de la Luz crossed that light. Dan faced the man in the shadows and de la Luz stopped.

"Señor Shea?" he asked.

"I'm Dan Shea."

Ramon de la Luz continued, speaking in Spanish. "You came with Martin O'Connor?"

"Yes."

"I came to warn you," de la Luz announced. "Leave El Puerto del Sol. Leave Señor O'Connor. This business does not concern you. If you value your life you will leave it alone."

With an effort Dan Shea restrained himself. His mind cried to him for action, his muscles ached with their tension. "George Delaney sent you," Dan Shea said sternly. "Go back to him and tell him that you've failed."

"There are a great many of us," Ramon de la Luz said softly. "You have already made enemies, *señor*. I am giving you a chance. You—"

Dan Shea's restraint broke. His left hand shot out and caught the coat of Ramon de la Luz. Dan pulled the man toward him, nearly lifting de la Luz from his feet, holding him tightly so that in the darkness of the porch their faces almost touched.

"Get out!" Dan Shea said thickly, his hand trembling with his wrath. "Get out, *cabron!*"

He thrust forward then, releasing his hold. Ramon de la Luz reeled across the streaming light from the window, brought up against the wall and, staggering, recovered his balance. Dan spoke once more.

"If you come to me again, you or Delaney—I'll kill you! Get out!"

CHAPTER XIII

TRAIL NORTH

ON THE night of his first day out from El Puerto del Sol, Dan Shea sat beside his campfire and looked into the darkness where his sheep were bedded. Out there in the dark beyond the firelight, there were five-thousand head of El Puerto del Sol ewes.

About him, clustered close, were his herders: Hilario Bargas; Nopomencenco Montano with the knife scar across his face; Hipolito, Nopomencenco's brother;

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Hilario's two sons, Eusabio and Cercencio, strong as young oxen; Juan Vigil, quarter-breed Comanche; and Vincente Lebya, the Apache boy. Seven men in all; hardy, strong-bodied, loyal to Dan Shea and to El Puerto del Sol. They were quiet, respecting the silence of their *patrón,* and close beside them their sheep dogs lay, eyes half-shut against the firelight.

It was odd, Dan Shea reflected, sitting there in the firelight, how he should have come to be here with the sheep; odd and yet natural, too. How could he have done otherwise? he asked himself. All the past events marched before him. His arrival in Bendicíon, his encounter with Martin O'Connor, his partnership, his love for Marillita, each fell into ordered sequence. Dan Shea shifted position beside the crackling fire, and his thoughts went on.

His eyes lighted as he thought of Marillita and Don Martin, then they dulled again. There were things to think of other than the sweet bitterness of parting. Many things. This was his task, this business of trailing five thousand sheep north to a Colorado market. This task he had set himself for the benefit of them all, for the welfare of El Puerto del Sol. But he wished that it had not been necessary. Others had wished that too: Marillita and Don Martin and Jesse Louder. Dan remembered his talk with Louder, the half-suspicion, half-frankness of the man.

Louder, his hostility apparent, had come to him as Dan prepared for his journey. There had been difficulties between Louder and O'Connor and now this suit had revived all the old dissension. Louder spoke of them frankly.

"I wish you were goin' to be here, Shea," he had concluded their conversation. "You an' me get along. I don't get along so good with O'Connor."

"I wish I didn't have to go," Dan Shea had answered. "I couldn't think of anything else to do though."

"No," Louder said moodily. "I guess there wasn't anything else to do."

"And I'll be back," Dan promised. "Mr. Louder, like you've said, you and me get along. I'm going to ask you to be patient while I'm gone. If anything comes up, I ask you to wait until I'm back, before you do anything about it. Will you do that?"

Louder thought for a time and then nodded. "That's fair enough, I guess," he said. "I won't make any promises, Shea, but I won't go off half-cocked."

"That's all I ask," Dan Shea said.

Louder was silent again, and then thrust out his hand. "So long, Shea," he said. "I'll push on home." Again he hesitated. Then: "I guess things will be about the same when you get back."

There beside his campfire, Dan Shea smiled. Jesse Louder had made no promises but his handshake and parting words had been enough. Dan had an ally in Louder.

The smile faded and Dan's eyes grew bleak, for George Delaney was in his mind now. Thoughtfully, Dan considered Delaney's part in all these happenings. Delaney gave them point, had surely been the motivating force. Dan could not believe that the man was simply the representative for Ramon de la Luz. No, knowing Delaney as he did, Dan was sure that suit and claim, trouble and grief, all the difficulties that had descended upon El Puerto del Sol, had originated in Delaney's clever mind. Dan scowled at the thought.

"Coffee, Señor Dan?" Eusabio spoke softly beside Dan Shea. With a start, Dan was brought back to the present. He reached out his hand and the scowl left his face.

"*Gracias,* Eusabio," he said gratefully.

IN THE morning the herd went on, dirty gray against the brown of the good fall grass, stretching out, changing shape but moving north as the ewes grazed. Behind the ewes and about them the herders and their dogs held place, watching wanderers, preventing straying, always moving forward.

Back of the herd came Eusabio, the cook, with his burros and the camp equipment. Ahead Dan Shea rode, scouting the country, choosing the course, selecting the camp site when night came. Three hundred

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miles to the north lay Colorado and the market. Slowly the sheep moved northward.

Day dawdled into day, each like its fellow. Fall rains came, cold and cutting to the skin as wind-driven drops swept earthward. Sunshine succeeded the rain and Eusabio dried the scanty bedding. Some few sheep, finding whorled milkweed, ate it and died. The mornings and the evenings merged into one until the days had no identity, and ever the herd crept slowly on.

Then, on a bright morning, riding ahead of the herd, Dan Shea saw smoke on the eastern horizon. He spoke briefly to Eusabio and then he rode toward the east, leaving the herd to Hilario's watchfulness.

After an hour of riding Dan was tempted to turn back. The smoke had died into a threadlike column and then was gone. Dan debated momentarily and then deciding to top one last rise, rode on again. Reaching the summit of the slope, he looked down into the valley below. There, before him, lay the source of the smoke. For a full five minutes Dan sat there, sickened but unwary. Then, with his heels, he urged the mule forward and rode down.

There was not much left in the valley. The little *plaza* was a cluster of smoke-blackened rock squares, the dirt roofs fallen into the ruins or sagging over them. Where hay had been stacked there was black ash, some of it still smouldering. A wagon was charred wood with its irons still hot to the touch. Destruction was all about and the scent of smoke was tinged with the odor of burned flesh.

Dan Shea, his rifle across his arm, left the mule and walked gingerly among the ruins. Here he found a body, the scalp ripped from the head, flies buzzing about, already at work. Here a woman had died, the mouth of the corpse still open in a soundless scream.

Here a man had fought. The arrow in his throat had killed him. Dan Shea whirled about, the big Sharps leaping to his shoulder, his finger on the trigger. He poised, ready, and the sound that had alarmed him was repeated, the rasp of movement on stone. Then, timidly, a voice said: "Señor Shea—"

Dan lowered the weapon. "Vincente!" he said sternly. *"Ven aca!"*

Vincente, eyes downcast, came from behind a ruined house. He said no word but advanced, coming like a dog would come to an angry master, obedient and placating, but afraid.

"What are you doing here?" Dan Shea demanded.

"I followed you," Vincente answered. "Always I follow you. Every day."

There, amidst that desolation, with death and ruin all about, Dan Shea almost laughed. Here then was explained the silence of Vincente when Dan spoke to him concerning the happenings in camp. Here too was explained a certain taciturnity among the herders. By mutual consent they had chosen to keep a watch over Dan Shea. Vincente was that watch.

Now Dan knew why, when upon occasion he had returned to camp and found Vincente missing, Eusabio had spoken concerning some errand that occupied the boy. Now Dan knew why Hilario's hostility toward Vincente had decreased until it was no more. Vincente was carrying a Springfield across his arm and there was a knife at his belt, and he limped.

"I hurt my leg," Vincente said, apologetically. "My foot slipped on a stone; otherwise the *señor* would not have heard me."

Dan eyed him sternly. "You follow me every day?" he demanded.

"Si." Vincente's voice was resigned. *"Yo crei*—I thought—" he broke off and made hasty amendment: *"Nosotros creimos* —we thought—"

"That I was a child that must be watched?" Dan finished, his voice harsh.

"No, *señor*. But you ride out alone and we knew that was not good. We would not have you hurt, *señor*. What would we do without you?"

"And so you followed?" Dan Shea said. "I think . . . well, no matter. Later we will talk of that. Now: Who was here? Who did this?"

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Vincente straightened and his eyes swept over the ruins, over the blackened stone of the houses, the still-smouldering hay, the burned wagon, the silently screaming woman and the man with the arrow in his throat. Black and beady and inscrutable, the eyes returned to Dan Shea's face.

"Los Indios de la Sierra Blanca," Vincente answered gutturally. "Apaches."

CHAPTER XIV

SALUTE THE WARRIORS

THERE was nothing that could be done at the *placita*. With Vincente walking beside the mule Dan Shea started back toward the west. Just at the edge of the ruins Vincente stopped and lifted his hand. Dan halted the mule. Vincente was listening intently. He turned toward a shed, the posts burned away and the roof sagging; listened a moment more and then went swiftly to the wreckage.

When Vincente emerged his face was triumphant and he held out a small bundle of inert fur. Dan Shea looked at the trophy. Vincente had found a puppy, so small that its eyes were not yet opened. The pup hung down from Vincente's hand. In all that desolation only the one small spark of life remained. With Vincente carrying the dog and trotting beside Dan's mule the two went back toward the sheep.

The ewes were spread out and grazing peacefully. Men assembled about Dan Shea and Vincente, listening to the tale that was told them, alarm in their eyes. Bold men these herders, else they had not ventured on this journey; fighters, ready with knife or gun, but with a tradition behind them—the tradition of fear of the Apache.

Dan Shea watched their eyes and saw their fear. He spoke brusquely. The Apaches had gone on. There was no cause for worry. Even Apaches would hesitate to attack so strong a party as this. Despite Dan's assurances fear lingered in the eyes of his men. Dan Shea took counsel with himself.

In company with all his kind he cherished one idea: Dead Indians were good Indians. Frontier experience lay behind Dan Shea. The Apaches, he believed, would hardly overlook this flock moving through the country. The sheep themselves would be of little value to a raiding party, the ewes were too slow of movement to be stolen and driven. Horses and cattle were more to the savage fancy. Still there was loot in the packs and scalps on the heads of the herders, both desirable from the Apache viewpoint. That raiding party was a menace.

Dan knew his men. Experienced in fighting, he realized that under the strain of waiting, or in the surprise of an attack, these men might break. If that occurred, sheep and men were lost.

But there was an alternative. They need not wait, need not sit helplessly, anticipating an attack. They themselves were in a position to take the initiative and under certain circumstances the herders would be brave enough. Dan rubbed his bearded jaw and looked at his men, and reached a decision. Calling Nopomencenco and Vincente to him, he gave instructions. They were, Dan ordered, to scout the country about the herd and make sure that it was clear of Apaches.

Nopomencenco and Vincente departed. Dan ordered Eusabio to prepare food, forbidding the kindling of a fire. Hilario he sent to the ridge north of the little valley wherein the flock grazed. Hilario was an outpost.

THE men munched cold food and eyed Dan Shea. They believed in him, would follow him blindly and loyally. On Dan's shoulders the responsibility, upon him the command. The sun was straight above. It was noon. Dan sent Cercencio to replace Hilario at the outpost.

Time wore on. The sheep grazed peacefully. Without orders the herders held them in the valley, men and dogs turning back those venturesome ewes that sought to climb the ridges. Eusabio concerned himself with the puppy rescued from the *placita*.

There was a goat in the herd, a doe that

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was followed by a three-months-old kid. Eusabio caught the doe and brought her in. He tied the goat's feet and bringing the pup to her, placed the small dog close to her udder. The goat fought and struggled and finally giving up, lay still and watched her captor with wicked, yellow eyes. Dan, strolling over, stood beside Eusabio. The pup sucked a teat, with small whimpering noises when he lost it.

Eusabio sought relief from the tension in talk. This, he informed Dan, was the way to raise a sheep dog. A dog taken from its mother before its eyes opened and given a goat to nurse, grew up with the idea that it was not a dog but a goat. So, later, the dog would consort with the goats and with the sheep, retaining its natural antagonism against coyotes and wolves, but always believing that it was a goat.

Dan nodded. He had heard the tale before. Perhaps it was true, perhaps not. At any rate, dogs that were so raised made good sheep dogs, working intelligently, and quietly with their charges.

Among the grouped herders Hilario spoke sharply, and pointed. Dan Shea saw a man coming down from the north, trotting along, a small black dot against the green grass. The man came on, resolved into Nopomencenco, drew close, reached Dan Shea and stopped.

Nopomencenco was panting. He drew great breaths into his deep chest and let them go. Dan waited. Still short of breath, Nopomencenco reported. They had, he said, found the Apaches. There were tracks to the north. The Apaches had seen the herd, of that Nopomencenco was certain. But the Indians were waiting. Perhaps five miles north they were. Vincente had located them.

"Where is Vincente?" Dan demanded.

He was watching the Apaches, Nopomencenco told him. There were not many in the raiding party. Vincente had sent him, Nopomencenco, back to report to Señor Shea.

"How many Apaches?" Dan asked.

Nopomencenco shrugged. He was not sure. Perhaps a dozen, perhaps a few more. Nopomencenco waited, watching his *patron.* So too, waited the others. Dan rubbed his hand against the stubble on his cheek, eyed his men and then spoke.

"We'll go to them," he directed, smiling grimly. "They are waiting for us. It would be bad to disappoint them."

A grin broke on Hilario's bearded face. All about Dan Shea the tension broke. It was almost as though he had invited these men to a fiesta. They would wait no longer. Here was opportunity to avenge themselves upon an hereditary enemy. There was a sudden babble of talk which Dan sternly checked.

He spoke rapidly. Cercencio would remain with the sheep. He could, with the help of the dogs, hold them in the valley. The rest were to accompany Dan Shea. They must obey his orders absolutely.

From about Dan the voices came in agreement. Dan stooped and picked up the Sharps.

TEN men followed Dan out of the valley. Cercencio, resolute and with a Springfield across his knees, remained in a cluster of rocks. If they did not return Cercencio was to go back. He was to abandon the sheep and return to El Puerto del Sol with the word, so ran Dan's instructions. But they would return, he reassured Cercencio. There was nothing to fear. Cercencio nodded. He understood.

Each man that followed Dan Shea carried a rifle and ammunition. Each man, too, had a knife. Dan dangled the heavy Sharps from his hand, and under his arm, beneath his coat, there was his Colt. Nopomencenco walked beside Dan, a guide and pathfinder. So, on foot and cautiously, they traveled north.

Beyond the ridge north of the valley that contained the herd, the country fell away in long folds. There were wide draws that ran across the line of march. Nopomencenco, questioned by Dan, spoke briefly concerning the nature of the country.

For the most part, the herder said, the ridges and the valleys hollows ran east and west. There was one long arroyo that swung

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in a slanting circle toward the river to the west.

Dan nodded. So much he could see. If there was water it would be in the arroyo. If there was water the Apaches would wait beside it. While the others waited, Dan made his plan. Where, he asked Nopomencenco, had he left Vincente? Nopomencenco pointed and explained, and Dan listened.

He knew—or believed he knew—the operation of the Apache mind. The Apache was like a snake. He hunted when it was necessary but, by choice, the Apache waited beside a trail for his game to come to him. So might these be doing.

If the raiding party knew of the presence of the herd—and Nopomencenco was sure that they did—then logically the savages would be considering the idea of attack, of loot and pleasure. They favored early morning or late evening for their raids. At those times men are unsuspecting and relaxed. And the Apaches had no reason to believe that the men with the sheep knew of their presence.

Dan frowned. If he knew, surely, where the Apaches waited, he would be able to beat them to the surprise. But he had no certain knowledge. Perhaps if he followed up the arroyo, scouting ahead with Nopomencenco . . .

"*Alla esta* Vincente," Nopomencenco announced.

Dan searched the country below him. He could see nothing until his swarthy companion pointed. Then, close by the arroyo he sighted movement. A man—at least Dan believed it to be a man—appeared momentarily between two clumps of mesquite.

"*Es* Vincente!" Nopomencenco said positively.

That might be true. At least the arroyo was the logical place to reach. Dan nodded and started down the slope, his companions following.

THERE were other ridges between that first high vantage point and the arroyo. They lost sight of the dry streambed; then, crowning a rise, they sighted it again, much closer now. The herders remained behind the protection of the low ridge and Dan and Nopomencenco crawled ahead.

The bank of the arroyo, two hundred yards away, lay barren of all life. Dan glanced at Nopomencenco doubtfully, turned his head again to look at the arroyo and his eyes widened with surprise. Vincente was walking from the arroyo toward them, his rifle swinging nonchalantly from his hand, pride evident in his every step. Dan lifted his head, twisted his body and, seated, waited for Vincente's arrival.

Vincente was both boastful and scornful. He had marked the progress of Dan Shea and the herders across every ridge, he said. Dan doubted this. They were a full four miles and more than an hour's travel from the sheep. No man, Dan believed, could see so far. He did not voice his doubts aloud.

Vincente continued. The Apaches were in the arroyo. They had camped beside water. They were sheep, Vincente boasted; White Mountain Apaches, not at all like the Chiricahuas from whom Vincente came. Now they were moving, coming down the arroyo.

"How many?" Dan demanded curtly.

Vincente held up both hands, the fingers spread, then he closed one fist and left three fingers extended on the other hand. Thirteen.

Dan nodded. His eyes scanned the bank of the arroyo. He stood up and gestured. Behind him his men arose. Swiftly Dan led the way across the expanse from ridge to arroyo bank. There, where mesquite grew, he stopped.

The herders eyed the mesquite doubtfully. They knew its toughness, knew its sharp thorns. Still, at Dan's low-voiced command, they wormed their way into the thorny thickets, each man selecting shelter. They could tolerate the scratching and cuts of the thorn, they could bear with the sand and the waiting and the discomfort for they were being given a chance to beat the Apache at his own game of ambush and throat cutting.

To each man Dan Shea spoke his warn-

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ing. They must wait until he fired the first shot; they must lie quiet and concealed. If they did not, the Apaches would be at their throats.

In his own place of concealment, flanked by Vincente and Nopomencenco, Dan sprawled down. Mesquite roots dug at him. A thorny branch trailed across his neck so that when he moved ever so slightly, the thorns pricked cruelly. His Sharps was shoved out, and before him was the thin screen of mesquite through which he could see the arroyo.

All along, on either side, Dan Shea's companions waited, ten of them; eleven men lying in ambush, the success of all dependent upon the quietness and fortitude of each individual. Dan watched the arroyo.

Time dragged by interminably. A big red ant, exploring, found Dan's arm and bit viciously, the sting almost unbearable. By shifting his eyes Dan could see Vincente's head some eight feet to his left, the black hair bound with an old rag. The head lifted. Dan's eyes were on the arroyo again. To the right, up the arroyo, a savage appeared riding a gaunt pony, moccasioned legs dangling, a rifle resting across his thighs as he rode.

The single savage came on, passed by Dan Shea, passed by Vincente. Not sixty yards away, he was following the course of the dry stream. Dan let him go. To the right, Nopomencenco sighed faintly, the barest whisper of sound. Dan did not move. The Apache rode on.

Now others appeared, a straggling line of them, two grouped together, then three, then one, then the others. The leader passed by Dan Shea. Dan counted. There were twelve in view. Dan held his finger on the trigger of the Sharps, cocked the hammer and took careful aim. When the Sharps roared the whole thicket of mesquite responded, leaping into life with the crash of the rifles.

DAN came up to his feet. His legs wide spread, another shell sliding into the greasy, smoking breech of the Sharps, he turned to the left.

There, up the arroyo, that first Apache —the scout who had passed by—was bent low over his pony's neck and sand was churning beneath the pony's feet. Again the Sharps steadied and then spilled its contents. The heavy five-hundred-grain slug must have pierced man and horse for both went down. Dan swung back to the right again.

There was wild confusion in the arroyo. From both arroyo and mesquite the yells arose. A savage, wiry and swift as a cat, scrambled up the further bank, poised for a moment and then collapsed into a bundle of rags and brown flesh. From the mesquite, heedless of thorns or footing, the herders came leaping, whooping, savage as the Apache themselves. Dan Shea dropped the Sharps and, with his pistol in hand, crashed through the growth and ran to the arroyo.

For perhaps a minute the fight raged and then, sudden as it had begun, was done. The herders, Nopomencenco and Hilario, Eusabio and Vincente, all of them, stood panting, the fierceness draining away from them, remaining only in their eyes and distorted faces; and in the arroyo, against its banks and on its sand, the Apache lay, twisted and grotesque, caught and destroyed in just such a trap as they themselves delighted in setting.

There was, of course, an aftermath to the fight. The herders and Dan Shea moved about the scene of the fighting, examining the bodies and searching them. From the evidence they collected there was no doubt that these were the marauders who had looted the *placita*. One savage corpse bore a gold cross about its neck; another wore earrings, and there were remnants of garments and fresh scalps to show.

Contrary to their general custom, the raiders had not traveled lightly laden. There were two pack horses down in the arroyo, killed perhaps in the first volley. The packs of these were opened and examined by the herders and from them such articles as caught the fancy were removed.

In this Dan Shea played no part. He stood watching and, as the shadows grew long in the arroyo, called his men off from

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their pursuit. The hour was late and night was coming. They must hurry back to the waiting sheep. Dan gave his orders. So, filled with their success, laden with the weapons, the savage finery, the loot that they had taken from the looters, the men started back, retracing their journey toward the herd.

IT WAS dusk when they reached the valley. Cercencio arose stiffly from amidst his rock fort and welcomed them. The herd was intact. There had been no alarm, Cercencio said, but he had heard the firing to the north.

The weary men went about their appointed duties. A fire was built. Eusabio prepared food. The men ate. Then, with the firelight flickering, with the tenseness eased, they rested, each man recounting his own exploits, so concerned with his own valor and glory that he hardly listened to the tales of his neighbors.

Dan Shea sat watching them, smiling a little. These men were children, strong in body, simple in mind. As he listened to the talk his smile broadened. A man without knowledge listening to the talk might well believe that these few men had met and vanquished the Apache nation.

They were scratched with thorns and more than one of them bore signs of the conflict, cuts received when they charged in to finish the fight. Their clothing was torn, more ragged than it had been before the battle. They were weary, but the excitement of their recollections buoyed them. Like children they talked and laughed and glorified themselves and each other.

Close to the fire Vincente bent above a bundle taken from an Apache packhorse. He untied the rawhide thong and laid the bundle open. Dan Shea, rising, strode across to survey Vincente's loot. Vincente looked up and grinned, then turning his attention to the contents of the pack.

There were a few skins, poor things, unworthy of a second glance. There was a pouch which, opened and shaken, gave forth a miscellany of objects: the dried foot of an eagle, the teeth of a wolf, lion claws, small chunks of ochre and white earth and tobacco. A medicine pouch, Dan surmised.

There was a long roll wrapped in a sheepskin from which the wool had been removed; there was a coat, a small one, Dan saw when Vincente held it up for inspection, wrinkled, but made of excellent material. Dan Shea frowned when he saw the coat. It was such a garment as no native would wear. The coat had belonged to a white man.

There was confirmatory evidence to that. The last article in the pack was the remains of a derby hat. Crushed and battered though it was, the identity was unmistakable. Dan Shea held out his hand and Vincente gave him the hat.

Squatting beside the Apache boy, Dan looked at the hat. It was made of hard brown felt and the crown was broken. He turned it in his hand. The leather sweatband was still intact and, faint upon the leather, letters had been stamped, unreadable now, but undoubtedly the initials of the original owner. Dan sought further to locate the maker's stamp and, perhaps, the name of the store from which the hat had been purchased. These were too faint for deciphering. He returned the hat to Vincente.

Vincente had opened the roll of sheepskin. Parchments were disclosed. Wordlessly he extended these to Dan Shea. Dan glanced at them and shrugged. He could speak Spanish but he could not read or write the language. These parchments that Vincente held out were written in Spanish and were yellow with age.

"We will take these with us," Dan decided. In his mind was an idea. Perhaps the papers from the sheepskin roll would disclose the identity of the man who had owned the coat and the derby. When he reached a place where there was someone who could read Spanish, Dan would make inquiry.

"Save them," he ordered. "I think—"

"Señor! Señor Dan!" Eusabio called from across the fire. Dan got up. Eusabio's voice excited. *"Ven aca."*

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Dan walked around the fire. Eusabio was pointing down and Dan, looking at the place Eusabio indicated, saw that the pup was nursing at the goat's udder. "He has his eyes open!" Eusabio exclaimed. "*Mira, mira, Señor* Dan!"

Dan bent down. It was just as Eusabio had said. The puppy's eyes were open and when Dan Shea attempted to detach the little dog from the teat, the pup clung fiercely and even growled, a bass rumble from the tiny throat.

"*Esta un bravo,*" Eusabio exclaimed.

"*Bravo,*" Dan Shea agreed. "That's his name: Bravo!"

Watching the pup, he smiled.

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Buryin' Pants

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

Author of "Night Comes Too Soon," "Cat of Gold," etc.

Johnny Cumso knew the white man's ways, but the Seminole law was deep in his heart. He'd have let them kill him—except for the pair of bright-hued trousers that Mase McKay couldn't stand to see all stained with blood

"TWO barrels o' buckshot in a feller's shirt kinda disorganizes him. But his pants oughta be kept outa the mess. Now, Sheriff—listen!" Mase McKay turned clear blue eyes upon the officer. "I ain't a party to run up yere out the South Glades yellin' fer help from the law, am I? None us McKays is."

"I'll say," retorted Sheriff Orengo. "It's the other way round. If I ever wanted to lay hands on you, Mase, them Shark River Seminoles'd hide you so slick the whole government couldn't find you. That's what makes this request of yours so funny.

"I bet the old men of the council don't

The net swished down over Mase from above

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know it. I heard you're pretty near one of 'em—the only white man ever allowed to see their 'gator dance and secret rites that ain't even known to the Indian towns up near Miami. So if old Spittin' Eagle ever knows you run to white man's law to stop 'em from executin' this Johnny Cumso, they'll never trust you again. Right?"

Mase McKay's lean brown face was Indian-hard. He wouldn't answer and the sheriff knew he wouldn't.

Orengo rolled up Johnny Cumso's death pants and handed them over the side of his car, parked just off the Key West road where Mase had stopped him.

"Hell!" said Mase suddenly. "If you can't save Johnny, save them pants! I paid two dollars and eighty cents fer 'em in Miami. Pink and purple stripes like what an Indian'd favor, guaranteed not to shrink, though I dunno what good *that'd* do a guy's bones once he's planted in swamp mud.

"I dunno what the old men's council is killin' Johnny fer. But the crazy fool is goin' to meet 'em tonight at a spot I'm tryin' to guess at, and stand up to a buckshot gun.

"No use argyin' with him. The council sent him word, and he'll be there. I told Johnny to lam out fer Andros Island and he looked insulted. His folks'd be disgraced forever in the tribe if he didn't foller Indian custom. All he asked me was to bring him down some pants. That's all he wears fer the buckshot."

"Well," grunted the sheriff. "You know how it is. We got a custom too, and it's to look the other way about Seminole fusses. They're a free nation; they never recognized the federal government—and it's the unwritten law of the state never to interfere with 'em. Matter of fact they never condemn one of their outfit unless he's a no-account Indian. They're pretty good folks all around."

"Yeh," said Mase. "An' so's little Johnny Cumso. I can't figger it out.

"He won't talk, and they won't talk. I'm goin' to git to the bottom o' this, but I ain't got so much time. Tonight is shootin' time fer Johnny."

"You goin' to be witness?"

"Hell, no! I ain't even supposed to know about it. But I'm goin' to bootleg them fancy pants in to Johnny. I know how to find him; but I wouldn't have ol' Spittin' Eagle think I was snoopin'."

"That's it," said Orengo. "The law don't figger in this. Mase, I knowed you since you were a pup. And as your old man says, you ought to git some serious views on livin'. I know you McKays been pretty close to them Shark River Indians ever since some hellin', wreckin' ancestors of yours helped 'em run Andy Jackson's dragoons out of the glades a hundred years ago. But they won't stand for you interferin'.

"I've known tough guys to just vanish in the swamp. An' I never sent in to ask how come. So if you disappear, I'm just sayin' farewell now, Mase."

"Damn if you don't sound cheerful." Mase grinned. "Why don't you furnish *me* some buryin' pants now if you feel so bad about it?"

"Ain't a bad idea," grunted the sheriff. "One way and another you pester the law a lot. Damn if I know why you come to me now."

"Fer Johnny. I figgered if you could git a couple o' swamp deputies in there first and arrest Johnny and throw him in jail, this buckshot party'd be postponed."

"Arrest him. What for? I dunno what he's done—but mebbe you do."

The sheriff turned hard, alert eyes on Mase's face. It showed nothing. "No," Mase grumbled, "I don't. I got mebbe ten hours to find out. Gimme them pants. I don't aim to waste good Indian pants argyin' white man's law."

He unrolled them and held them to the morning sun.

BOY, they *were* pants. Big broad stripes like a jukejoint awning. The sheriff thought there must be a rainbow heaving

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up above the Gulf Stream offshore. Mase had hunted through every fire-sale house up Miami Avenue for them.

If they didn't fit little Johnny Cumso it wasn't Mase's fault. He'd tried them on and nearly cracked out the seams. Johnny was about twenty-eight inches waist measure, Mase figured.

When Johnny stepped out on the sand of some secret key of the south coast, Chief Spittin' Eagle would sure get an eyeful. But he'd be right gratified that Johnny respected the tribe law. They thought Johnny was a renegade, that he'd been outside too much, and mixed too much with the whites. He'd even shipped on a sponger to the Bahama reefs.

The five old men of the little Shark River clan had feared Johnny would not show up. But Mase knew he intended to. So he rolled up the pants and waved to the sheriff.

"Well," he said and grinned. "What about it? You won't interfere, an' I'm bound by—by—well, I reckon Indian custom—not to."

"That," grunted Orengo, "is what I've heard. Blood brother to 'em."

Mase grunted back. Some things he never told white men about.

There was talk that Mase McKay knew a lot about the obscure clans of Everglades Seminoles, who lived deep in the jungles, and had nothing to do with the show-Indians up around the Florida resort towns.

Mase let people think so but he really knew very little, friendly as he was with them.

Bluff, blow and brag—that's what Old Man McKay said Mase did about that Indian stuff, like he did about everything else.

But now and then Mase came through on something. Take that rumor that the eating seas and hurricane tides three years ago had uncovered the ribs of a British brigantine that had vanished in 1782 off the Tortugas, and that old time Key West wreckers were supposed to know more about than they should. When coast folks began to speculate where it might be, Mase said he knew and he told them. But the few searchers never did find it and the matter was dropped.

Old Man McKay eyed his son shrewdly after that and, for once, didn't bawl him out about lyin' and bluffin'. He noticed about that time that the few Seminoles who came to the McKay store on Jigger Key showed a renewed interest in young McKay.

Just as Sheriff Orengo did now, by the side of the highway from which a half-choked little canal straggled westward into the pathless sawgrass. Mase went down the bank and tossed the buryin' pants into his dugout and waved a hand casually to the Law.

"You heard me!" yelled the sheriff, his foot on the gas, "If you go messin' in what don't concern white men, I ain't tailin' back in the swamp to find your bones—not in skeeter time."

"Any time you tail me back in, I'll be seein' buzzard sign an' know right exactly where yore bones is!" yelled Mase. "Dang if this ain't the last time I ever run to the law askin' anything!"

"Devilin' Mase," sneered the sheriff, "every time I quit talkin' to you and get up the road I can remember a dozen reasons why I shoulda took you to the jailhouse then and there."

"Jest goes to show," yelled Mase from his canoe, "yore brains is slippn'. This yere'll cost you the whole sixteen votes at Jigger Key come next 'lection—or mebbe only fifteen if all that grief an' destruction you prophesy fer me should happen. Git goin'!"

MASE poled his cypress canoe a mile up the ditch; and when he came to deeper water in the winding slough that entered the big grass, he sat back to his paddle, and the pelicans heard him singing:

Settin' on the fence—didn't mean no harm,
When along comes a man, says 'I'll buy yore farm.
I'll buy yore cows an' yore corn so bloomin'—
But dang if I swap fer yore ol' woman!'

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Then he thought of little Johnny Cumso, and looked at his dollar watch. The durn thing run pretty good but only when he shook it. He looked at the sun and at the brackish tide along the mud bank; and he knew the time better than any gov'-ment perfesser in Washington.

"Hey, pants! Close to 'leven, an' you an' me got a date with Johnny afore sundown. Hope he ain't stallin' us. Hope he ain't fixin' to run out on us and meet his shootin' party with jest some ol' greasy overalls. It shore won't be right. Stow yore gab, pants—I got work cut out to do.

"Yeah," Mase thought, "Johnny won't lift a foot to save himself. I hope I never git so honest as them savages is about some things."

High, still noon, and the ebb was flowing. It took him faster, deeper, into the grassy sea. He saw the first mangrove islets west by south.

Johnny had been evasive about where his white friend should meet him until Mase had tempted him with those pants.

"Made me promise I wouldn't go near the shootin' party, or even let ol' Spittin' Eagle know I ever hear about it. If them Indians ever learn I run to the sheriff about it, they'd never trust me again. Well, I took the chance an' didn't do any good. Tough on Johnny Cumso."

He held on steadily, hot hours into the labyrinthine channels.

White egrets crossed ahead of him, a bull 'gator slipped from the mud, moccasins slid from his shadow passing grass points. The sun was lowering over the first mangrove barriers skirting the sea shoals beyond when Mase began to look for Indian sign.

Johnny had said there would be a mark by the end of the first salt lake.

"Yeh," said Mase softly. "A boy who keeps his date with death'll keep it with me—if he trusts me. Yeh."

Only a swamper would have noticed the little piece of cane with one white-skinned section stuck in the mud under the mangrove point of the lake. Mase stopped paddling, looked at the sun and drifted.

Silence; not a ripple on the pink mirror of a lake. Summer clouds piled like glaciers above the unseen Gulf. Mase watched the green-gray wall of mangrove. He saw a faint broken spot above the matted roots, and reached a hand to them.

"Proud folks, techy folks . . . But what's Johnny done? No use askin' *him*. Only clue I got was that he asked me, did I ever tell any white man that I knew where the ribs o' that British ship was found? And hell, I lied for three years about it to stop any swampers from findin' it! I never even went near the sand key after I saw the old council men didn't like it. Indian stuff—tabu. Nobody can go there except the five old men o' the council. Hey—I wonder now?"

HE THOUGHT a moment before he crawled under the mangroves. "This is Indian country. It's no good to anybody so, of course, the Indians can have it. Power boats can't get in from outside nor white hunters from inside—except guys like me. And I been allowed to perouse around since I was a kid, and knew Seminole kids. Like Little Johnny Cumso—an' Spittin' Eagle's boys. When I was a kid there was near a hundred in his tribe. Now I bet there ain't sixty. Gittin' too populated and civilized in here fer me and Indians."

It *was* populated. Crawling a hundred feet across the root mats, watching the tide mud and the coon oysters clumped around each mangrove butt, Mase met one snake, two frogs and nine horseflies. Yeh, gittin' settled up, this piece of jungle.

Beyond the mangrove barrier he pawed out on a low shell and coral ridge with a few cabbage palms and palmettos fighting their heads to the air.

He didn't see nor hear a thing but he squatted patiently in the bars of sunset finding a way through the growth. He knew that Johnny would have heard his first touch to the outer channel mangrove. Johnny would wait to see that Mase was alone.

"Funny suspicious guys, these back-in

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Seminoles. They don't ackcherly trust anything that even smells white. Hey, boy!"

He spoke in a low voice, for he felt rather than heard his friend's coming.

Johnny Cumso stood erect behind him watching intently. As he'd want to face the old men's buckshot—head up, clean and proud. His mother would demand it that way.

"Hey?" grunted Mase. "You picked a fine meet-up hole. I might have missed you entire. No other way to git here except by that crawl you gave me? Who you tryin' to throw off the trail?"

"To be alone—think," said Johnny. "You know too."

"All I know," grunted Mase, "is if my old man told me he was goin' to sprinkle me with birdshot—jest number eight even, I'd tell him to go jump off the dock. If he didn't, I'd put him there. But then I'm jest a no-'count white man. How you, Johnny?"

"I am well," Johnny said and came closer. He was dark, slightly built, perhaps eighteen. He'd been outside, off and on since he was fourteen, and had picked up fair English.

"Gimme a cigarette," said Johnny," I will smoke with you. I am well."

He smoked quietly, his thin face no more grave nor expressionless than as if he'd been sitting with Mase in a picture house at Everglades City or Immolakee.

Johnny's black hair was cut in a thick round mat at his neck, brushed carefully back and oiled. No shirt, no garment, save the ragged trousers held by a braided palm belt. Mase grinned and dragged on his smoke.

"What time you meet the three old men?"

"As the last light goes. They come by the west channel."

"I guess no use askin' where you meet 'em but it can't be far. Mebbe the west end o' this key. There's a clearin' and clean sand."

"How," said Johnny, "you know?"

"Oh, I rambled and scrambled this country! But I never been near the wreck spot—since I first discovered it three year ago an' promised Spittin' Eagle I'd never mention it to any man. I bet now, with the new hurricane channels in there, it's more uncovered—ain't it?"

Johnny's face was a rock. No one save the old medicine men were supposed to visit that mystery spot; and he knew that Mase knew it. It had been a cunning question—but it was as if Johnny never heard it.

"You will go now," said Johnny. "I wait an hour and I go. It will not be right if you are near us. Go now, my friend."

Well, I'm through argyin," said Mase. "Said all my say to you. Can't talk to Spittin' or then he'd know I wormed the truth out o' you, by guess an' by Gawd—an' you'd lose face with yore family. So I'm through mebbe. Boy, you ought to see them pants!"

JOHNNY'S eyes had been fixed on that bundle with the only gleam of interest Mase had seen yet. But he said nothing as Mase broke the string. Mase shook them loose from the wrapping.

"Boy, when I start to Glory, I hope to wear pants like 'em. I wanta see Ol' Gabriel lose a toot of his trumpet when he sees me passin' them pearly gates. When I git to Heaven I hope I stop the show."

"They are nice," said Johnny slowly. "I thank you. No one will ask where I got them. But mebbe they guess who did this."

"Yeh, they'll figger me in it. But if I keep my trap shut an' pretend I never knew nothin' about it, Ol' Spittin' can't bring the subject up with me. I'd like to ask what you done to git the death call but I know it's no use. I never seen such close-mouthed guys as you can be, on family matters like a dose o' buckshot."

Mase rose. He was getting lathered into rage with his sense of defeat.

"Put 'em on," he growled. "I left the price tags on 'em so them medicine men'll know they ain't no secondhands. Hell, if I had pants like 'em you find me jiggin' around some juke joint Sattiday night down the Key road, an' not in some damn graveyard. . . . Get into 'em."

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Mase passed them over—and then he trembled with some wild thought. Johnny took his buryin' pants silently, smoothed the two-inch purple stripes, and slid a thin leg into them. Mase turned aside. The last sunlight was on Johnny's pants and they sure hurt a man's eyes. They sure did. . . .

Mase had to blink and turn away again.

He picked up Indian Johnny's discarded ragged overalls and went to the edge of the shell ridge. He shoved them deep into the mud and planted a foot on them, and came back wiping his hands. Johnny was looking at himself carefully.

"Boy, you look like you was headin' a fish-fry parade through colored town in Miami, damn if you don't. I swear, I never seen such guys as you deep-swamp folks."

He came before little Johnny Cumso and blinked again. Johnny looked up suddenly and the last sun was on his copper face. He smiled slowly, and then Mase broke loose.

"Look here, blast you! You know somethin'? I fergot it myself. I ain't been paid fer them pants!"

"Pay?" said Johnny, puzzledly. "Me—how? I think you my friend—"

"That nothin' to do with it! I'm a business man, that's what—in spite o' what my ol' man says. I ain't been paid fer the pants—an' they cost me two dollars and eighty cents besides bus fare to Miami both ways. And extrys too, like eatin' and a coupla beers. Dang it, I'm gittin' stung on this buryin' deal. You hear me, Johnny?"

Johnny stared at him coldly, puzzled, then hurt to the core.

Mase bawled at him loudly. "Gimme my pants! Changed my mind! Git out them—"

Johnny nodded slowly, sorrowfully. He bent over to get out of his death pants and his chin was out. Mase swung from his heels. Little Johnny Cumso went back and his black head hit the shells with a crunch.

MASE listened a moment above him. "Boy, it ain't yore fault. You're jest kinda kidnapped. I found you swipin' my clo'es and crocked you up. I'm tellin' Spittin' Eagle there ain't no buryin' till I git paid fer what the show cost me. Boy, I got to git you outa here fast."

The Indian was quickly slung over Mase's shoulder, and Mase started. When he had to crawl it was tough, for Johnny's head kept bumping Mase's heels. Mase got his teeth into the death pants and crawled back over the crushed path he had made.

When he reached water and his dugout, he was all in. He rolled Johnny over the side and sat with the paddle across his knees, unable to continue the growling chatter with which Mase was wont to jeer at the world and its doings.

But he watched the darkening western shore of mangroves. If that cleared point was the death rendezvous, a guy ought to travel east. He thought of another thing.

"If this fool comes to, he'll slide overboard or start to fight. Either way, it'll attract that shootin' party. Johnny, I got to be mean."

He fumbled under his seat for seine cord and gun rags.

When he took the paddle again, Johnny Cumso was neatly bound, gagged and lying face downward with his black head between Mase's ankles.

Mase dug water powerfully and as might be, keeping close under the evening shadows of the mangrove wall. Now and then he stopped, listened.

No sound or motion came down the little lake. Old Spittin' Eagle and the other two old men would be waiting, smoking quietly, with hardly a word to one another; and the muzzle-loading double-barrel number ten shotgun, which had been the Shark River council's execution piece for fifty years, loaded and oiled in its wrappings, waiting for the condemned to appear.

"This here action o' mine is goin' to be tough to explain. If I took Johnny outside and turned him over to the sheriff, he'd be back in no time. If I took him home to Jigger Key, it'd be a scandal fer the old man and git me nowhere. I dunno.

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Won't have a friend left among the Seminoles. Not even Johnny."

He worked on more swiftly now for once he was across the slough where the big sawgrass cut through the mangrove islet he could evade pursuit.

But there would be none. The old men would wait tranquilly all night and then return to their tiny hammock beyond the head of Shark River.

They would do no more except to ask Johnny Cumso's family to have him appear before the council. If he did not, disgrace eternal; they would be condemned by silence to leave the tribe. Mase knew that much.

"Then medicine men got ways o' workin' on their people's feelin's that white folks can't guess at. Old stuff—deep stuff. Quit buttin' me, Johnny."

The bound victim had come to and was slowly trying to raise his head. He twisted about, gasped through the gag and glared up.

Mase stared over him at the canoe's bow. The Indian worked his chin over the side and watched the darkening woods. Then he looked at Mase and nodded slightly.

"Yeah? Don't give me trouble. Jest changed my mind about them pants. Wanted 'em back, and you happened to be in 'em. It's what some dang Miami lawyer'd call a writ o' seizure. Boy, you ain't no more than a bug on them pants that I ain't got time to shake off. Stop kickin'."

FIVE minutes later Johnny worked up to stare at a cove in the next mangrove reef. The trees were mighty here, their tops overhanging a labyrinthine slough and this was moving water.

Mase nodded back; he recognized the spot even after three years. It was after the October hurricane that he had been on a lone search along this coast and had come upon the ancient buried wreck. Storms of a century ago and more had driven a shattered brig far past Cape Sable, over the wide shoals to bury itself in the glades jungle.

Other hurricane tides had drifted it with sand; then others had uncovered and torn it apart.

Early wreckers had seen it and then forgotten the spot. It had been buried in sand and mangrove until Mase McKay had discovered again the few white bones of a nameless ship.

Then Old Spittin' Eagle had come to him and asked that nothing be said outside, to other white men. It had something to do with early Seminole wars, Spittin' had vaguely muttered.

Mase had understood and had told no man he was ever on this spot. Old Spittin' had nodded approvingly. Mase had no questions, and the old men of the hidden tribe understood that too.

Indian silence—this gabbing, boasting swamp man could hold that as faithfully as they did. It accounted for many of the privileges that McKay's traders had had back inside.

Mase stopped paddling.

His dugout was drifting silently into the cove; the dark mangroves hid the entrance behind him. In the starlight he saw the light blur which was the bed of the lost ship. He could even make out the broken bulwark, bits of the rail amidships, the white bone stump of a mast, and the shattered poop that hung now over a dark pool.

Mase stared hard.

Either the stern had been dug out from the sands by the hands of men, or storm tides had cut away the bar below it. There was water where he had seen sand hummocks three years ago.

He looked down at his captive, for Johnny had twitched against his foot. Johnny moaned slightly under the gag. There was terror in his eyes, where the buckshot sentence had brought none.

"What," Mase muttered, "is this about? What's got you down, Johnny? Sure, I know this place is queer—something yore old men didn't want Indians or whites messin' into—but who's been here? And why? Listen! Has it anything to do with you an' that buckshot gun?"

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Johnny slumped sullenly. Gagged or not, he wouldn't answer. The canoe drifted nearer, and the high stern cut the starshine on the pool below.

He saw the dark ports; the sands of a century had been cleared from the stern cabin. He saw a rope coil and some tools and a water butt beyond the shattered rail.

Utter silence. Even Johnny, on his back in the canoe bottom, did not move.

Mase muttered: "It sure gives a guy creeps. A buckshot gun openin' up in here would sound right cheerful. Hey, boy, if I pull that rag wad out o' your teeth, will you talk to me or cuss me? Or raise a yammer that'll call ol' Spittin' mebbe a mile away? I guess I better not trust you. You wouldn't lie to me but you wouldn't promise either. Shouldn'ta come in here but when I remembered, I thought it might explain all this funny stuff.

"You been in here before an' the ol' medicine men didn't like it. But it oughtn't to draw a death sentence for a man. It don't make sense. It's somethin' else."

He picked up his paddle and Johnny flinched. Johnny's head hammered his ankle. One stroke sent the dugout nearer the wreck, and Johnny was fighting his bonds and moaning.

"Want me to back out, do you? Don't want me in here, hey? Well, my ol' man has frequent remarked that if I smell trouble anywhere I ain't happy till I gits my nose in it.

"Old Spittin' can buckshot you mebbe, but he'll think twice about me. I'm a guy who'd object. Yeh, boy, I'd squawk, dang if I wouldn't. When I ain't satisfied I let 'em know it a mile around."

The canoe drifted in the starlight under the overhanging stern. In the tide beyond the silent pool Mase saw a faint luminous blur, then something like a green shield turning to fade out.

"Sharks huntin' in on the tide. No skin off me an' you. They'll chase the mullet till they jump right in the boat an' that'll be breakfast tomorry. Hey, sharks, do yore stuff!"

Johnny was fighting to free his elbows. Jabbing his chin on Mase's shoe. Johnny was frightened at last—scared to his soul.

"Boy," Mase muttered. "I'll take the chance. You want to talk now. But don't you holler fer them buckshot boys. I wouldn't care to meet Spittin' just now. Get on yore side."

HE KNELT forward and bent over the bound man feeling for the knots in that wet cord. He'd made them pretty tight around Johnny's elbows and wrists. They sure were cuttin' deep. But Johnny kept banging his head on the wood and then staring upward past Mase's shoulder into the starlight.

Mase saw a shadow above. It was the high square transom of the ancient ship, white and dry as dead man's bones, and as lifeless.

Mase bent to his job. "Remember, boy, I get the gag out and you keep yore mouth shut. Otherwise I got to clip you goofy again. You—"

Mase heard something. The sound was very soft, slithering. Hardly the whir of a rattlesnake, hardly the rustle of a leaf. A sound like a very small motor perhaps, whirling.

He swerved back from Johnny, glanced up. Something was between him and the stars yet he could see the stars through it.

Then it fell on him.

On his head and shoulders, down on to his elbows and hands. Soft, damp, clinging coils, and he knew at once what it was. A circling cast-net and he was in it.

The lead weights came swiftly closing all about him. The draw rope was whistling up past his ear to the center ring above his head. It was fast and precise as a machine. The man who dropped it knew his job.

The heavy leaded fringe of the net dragged in mercilessly on Mase's arms and when he rose he was swung and the whole net tightened until his arms were as if in a straitjacket, and clamped to his sides by his own weight danging in the web.

"Johnny!" Mase yelled, and forgot that

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Johnny was still bound in the canoe. "Look out, Johnny!"

His foot struck the water. The canoe had veered under him.

Mase saw a green blur below it, then another ahead as the boat drifted slowly. He tried to draw his feet higher.

The sea wolves were roving in from the tide, drawn by the stirred water. The mullet fled in streaks of phosphorescent light. The flash of one shark followed them; but the two larger shapes faded slowly till he saw them no more. A man only saw them when they moved.

"Waitin'," Mase thought. "Curious. Watchin' that canoe—and me. This rope's tightenin' on me. If I could git hand to my pocket, my knife—open it. If I could—"

The leads and meshes gripped his thigh on one side. On the other it was higher. Maybe he could twist his arm free with a little slack in the central draw rope. Then he felt his body lifted.

He could see nothing except the rope above him vanishing as it was hauled over the stern of the wreck. That silent unseen man had power.

"Once he drags me to deck I'm gone," Mase muttered. "Or if he swings and drops me . . . I'd be a fine chunk o' meat tied in a package for them killers below. Three now—three—"

He kicked out with his legs, struck the water. The three unseen sharks became luminous again, moving slowly to watch this struggle under the overhang of the ship.

The rope stopped ascending.

"That's it," Mase grunted. "Swing an' drop me—tied—to 'em."

The rope did swing a bit and Mase swung his legs wildly backward.

His shoe caught something. Rusty metal, a segment of twisted metal, the collar of an ancient rudder post which he now saw dimly. He gripped it with his foot.

When the next swing came he thrust his head back and caught the taut rope in his teeth and dragged at it. That gave him a little slack. He strained and bit and hauled. He got enough slack to loosen the leads about his body an instant, and jerked his right arm free.

"Now, that knife—"

HE WORKED his hand to the pocket and gripped the heavy knife. [illegible] he had locked both legs about the rudder post, and the man who had trapped him hauled and jerked the line.

Mase resisted desperately while he tried to get the back of the knife in his teeth and use his hand to open it. He got it open at last and drove the blade across the cast-net knots just as the draw-rope tightened and dragged again.

The knife came back across his cheek, gashed it from ear to chin. But his arm broke through the rent he'd made, and he wrapped it about the post.

"Now, damn you," Mase grunted," drag your dangedest—see who's best at it, you or me." He wiped his face. Blood. Plenty of blood from his cut. Suddenly there was a mighty threshing battle just under him. The pool gleamed in pale fire. Blood. That was it. The killers had smelled the first drip of it and were furious.

By the light of one whipping fin Mase saw the head of another. The head above water, the serried teeth; and the brute was pushed aside by another's charge.

The little pool filled with them, wild at the blood smell. They could have touched Mase's knee with their snouts if they'd charged higher. Suddenly the rope went loose above him and he nearly fell headlong upon the gleaming killers.

But the net saved him now for he'd twisted a broken square of it about the post with his arm and he hung. That knife—if only he had not dropped the bloody knife when it was jerked into his face!

The water below was livid with battle. The sharks crashed the sand and coral pool seeking that blood taint. They charged the heavy dugout in which Johnny Cumso drifted ten yards away and spun it aside. But Mase was thinking grimly.

"He loosed the line—all that racket made him think they had me. Yeh, it'd

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sound that way. Now what'll he do? I can work my way out this bag now, but then what? He'll try to make sure I'm gone."

The water was quiet now.

The sharks were a moving blur out toward the tide. The canoe had drawn them—they believed it to be the source of the blood scent. Mase tried to cease breathing. The unseen man would surely try to peer below the counter now, to see a victim torn to pieces in the net.

Mase hung and crouched.

It was so still that he heard his blood drip. Strike the water with a soft *plop*, and a smaller shark came flashing back. Then they all charged and again the battle was on thirty inches below Mase's bent knees. Gripping with knees and one arm, trying to free the other from his side. He had just got it loose when he heard a voice.

It came not from the deck above him but from the sandbar toward the end of the spit. The unknown man had dropped from the hulk forward.

"Johnny?" he called in a low voice. "That's you, eh? So you did bring someone in here, did you? Well, you saw what happened to him. You said you'd never bring anyone to spy on me, didn't you?"

Mase tried to guess that voice. Not an Indian, not American—it had the soft broad quality of an Out-Island man, somewhere down the Bahamas, Turk's Island, or maybe farther down the West Indies.

"Johnny?" the voice called. "It certainly is you. Come ashore." The voice laughed unpleasantly. "Something to say to you, Johnny." Then the voice snarled. Johnny was writhing and gasping unable to answer.

Mase could just see the dugout close off shore and the figure on the sand by the bright starlight. Then the voice said:

"Won't talk to your old chum, eh, Johnny? I'll come get you."

The sharks were swarming under the wreck's counter. The man watched them briefly, then took a swift plunge to the canoe's bow. Mase heard him mutter astonishment to find a bound prisoner within. He drew the dugout softly to the sand and stood above it silently.

"A bit thick," he said slowly. "I can't get it. You didn't come back as you promised, Johnny, but here you are—trussed up and gagged! It couldn't be a trick on your old skipper of the *Saddie Scott*, could it? Captain Larry who got you out of Quarry Rock prison in Jamaica? No—hardly a trick—not with you tied and gagged."

Johnny twisted in the dugout. The skipper, Larry, dragged the bow farther up and bent above the captive. "Can't understand it, but I must let you talk, Johnny—for a while."

MASE McKay swung to the rudder post under the dark of the ship's overhang. He heard Johnny's first sullen mutter when he sat up. "Jamaica man?" Mase thought. "Or one of those Cayman Islanders by his talk. They get me down with their line o' language, like outa a book.

"So Johnny got into trouble when he shipped with the turtle men last year? And this Larry got him out o' jail—then Johnny brought him in to Florida. Smuggled him in past the patrols? Fetched him to this wreck—and what for? I guess that explains the buckshot council. The medicine men got wind of it an' so they staged tonight's party fer Johnny. Still, it don't seem crime enough to draw killin'. Must be more to it."

Captain Larry dragged Johnny up to his feet. His elbows still tight behind back. Helpless and silent.

Larry spoke. "Now tell your old skipper. I told you if you brought your Indian clan in here to interfere I'd finish you. But you came bound. Who did it, and what for? He went to the sharks—a nice bit."

"A good man," whispered Johnny thickly. "A white man—my friend. Good man—"

"An American, eh? An officer, was he? That's worse for you."

"No," said Johnny stolidly. "Now he is dead. Let me go to my people tonight. I will die then. That is all."

"No, it isn't. I'm not through searching yet for the ship's chest."

"There is nothing," said Johnny. "I told

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you so before. My people came here years ago. The old men. They took iron and things they could use from this ship. Then the sand buried it again in the storms. They never found money I think. It was before I was born."

"I read the records in Jamaica long ago too. No great treasure but sovereigns and shillings—gold and silver in the pay chest. I came to find it and no one will stop me, Johnny. Not you. Nor any Indian ghost story nor American law. I'm not that sort."

"My friend is dead," said Johnny: and would say no more.

Larry laughed. Mase could see him dimly in the starlight. A tall, agile seaman sort: he had known those yellow-skinned Out Islanders. Quick with knot and knife. They gave a lot of trouble to Colony or American law when they wanted to be bad. Turtle hunters, fishermen, smugglers from Campeche Bay to the Gulf Coast, great schooner-men.

"You better speak," Larry said. "You're in trouble with your tribe but you're worse off here now—after you informed on me."

"No," said Johnny. "I don't know how it was found out. But you killed one of us, Billy Tigertail when he was sent here to find out what was going on. You threw his body in the upper lake and it drifted ashore. The council said I did it, and I had betrayed this place where they come to meet for old customs. They will shoot me for it when I go home."

"*When?*" Larry laughed. "No—it won't be safe for me. You'll stay."

Johnny squatted on the shells and was silent again. A late moon was making the light better and he stared at the East over the swamp.

Mase was working silently free of the clinging net. He feared to drop it and make the slightest splash in the pool. Larry would hear and the sharks would return. He saw two out in the tide past the cove. Even the sound of a voice would draw them now, alert to a lost blood trail. Larry was watching those faint luminous shapes.

"No," he muttered," I better keep you here—with your friend. So, you won't tell me who he was? Strange you were tied up—and he was your friend! No matter now. When he sent his boat under the old *Vesta's* stern, I knew I had him. Daren't shoot, Johnny, but I could throw a castnet better than any man on Grand Cayman. Clever trick, eh?"

EVEN as he talked he watched the sharks roving back to the wreck, and then nose along the margins of the pool, hunting. Then a ripple stirred. A gleam came under Mase's feet.

The wolves knew meat was there just above water. Another gathered closer. They swam in small circles, slowly, alertly. Perhaps another drop of blood had fallen?

Larry thought that was queer. The killers should have dragged the bait out in the tide, torn it to shreds by now.

He left Johnny standing on the sands and went cautiously back. He thought he saw a trailing rope from the stern, and everything should have gone under the sea wolves' teeth. Larry came into the denser shadow over the pool and watched long, silently.

"Now this is odd." He called: "What is that hanging there?"

He bent from the sand's edge to see more, and then Mase saw Indian Johnny move. He came soundlessly in Larry's track, barefeet in the sand. Then Johnny rushed, head down. Awkwardly with his bound arms, he crashed into the bigger man's back.

Mase McKay sprang from the post. High and far as he could above the green shapes of death in the pool. He couldn't make it, quite. He came down in water to his waist with a mighty splash, and saw the sharks make way like streaks of sheet lightning before him. When they turned back he was in the shoals. Then ashore where Larry had whirled on the helpless Indian.

Mase went into the two with a rush, swinging both hands.

Larry had jerked Johnny from his feet at the edge of the sand, and kicked him in the face closer to the pool before he turned to face the fighting man in the star-

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light. He just got his hands up when Mase bull-necked him in the breast, lifted him and let go.

The Cayman Islander yelled in mid-air. Then he struck. The splash of him went over Johnny, and then a mightier surge from the charging brutes. Mase jerked at Johnny, hauled him back, for now the sharks were heaving fins in a fighting mass half out of the water in their madness to kill.

Mase pulled Johnny to his feet. "Come on away—it ain't nothin' to look at. They got him ten feet below."

"It is quiet now," said Johnny. "I saw you there under the boat before he did. I was afraid he would notice. Then he did."

Mase did nothing. He didn't like this. It was quiet now—very. Ripples on the pool, and far down and out towards the tide, a dim moving shield of green. It turned and sank, brightened to luminous beauty for a second and dimmed to nothing.

"Took him out with the tide like he thought they'd took me," said Mase. "Funny he didn't notice the difference—they all came back—but now they won't. I guess that guy never studied 'em when they was on a hunt for big meat. Well, anyhow I ain't it. Not tonight!"

He worked at the bonds on the Indian's numb arms.

"Hey, Johnny? I heard most of what that bird said. And he wasn't goin' to let you get out o' here. One of your clan, old Billy Tigertail, interfered with him and Larry put him away. You were blamed. Why couldn't you tell the old men?"

Johnny was passive while Mase stripped off his bonds; his face held no excitement. Then he began to speak quietly, seeming to pick his words with care.

"It would have made no difference when I couldn't prove it. They knew I had brought an outside man in and this was a place the council allowed no one to come. They had a story of spirits here—dead sailors seen by their fathers. So the old men said."

"Them big shots'll tell you anything—jest like white medicine men will do. Only we call 'em lawyers and such. How about that ship's chest he dug for in the cabin?"

"I don't know," said Johnny slowly. "I think the first Seminoles who found the wreck would have got it. But Captain Larry believed it was there. He got me out of the jail when I was arrested in Jamaica with his smugglers if I promised to bring him here. That is all, my friend."

"You been in bad company," said Mase. "Now, listen, maybe there ain't bad company enough in this yere world to go 'round, so you lemme have what there is. You don't ship on no boats outside no more. You stay back in with your folks—hear me? The old home spot fer a simple little Injun like you. Hear me, Johnny?"

"Yes," said Johnny. "I know. You are now blood brother again. I will tell the council all—that you heard the man say all. And that you saved me tonight."

Mase wiped blood and water from his cheeks and laughed.

"Boy, yo're right. I'll tell Spittin' Eagle, an' make him like it. But you saved me, Johnny—rushin' this Larry. He'da got me under there with a gun or knife. I was what you might call kinda treed by them sharks.

"Come on, let's paddle out an' find that buckshot party tonight. Ol' Spittin' will call me down somethin' terrible fer hookin' into Indian business. But shucks, my hide's tough."

"The council will decide," repeated little Johnny.

Mase grinned. The council would decide, huh? Well, not this time. Mr. McKay's son had been dodging sharks and worse and he couldn't be bothered acting polite to any old council.

"It's me that decides," said Mase. "And say, about them pants? You won't be needin' 'em right soon, so I'm gonna borry 'em an' wear 'em to a beer joint down Key Largo next Sattiday night. There's a curb waitress there I sure aim to make jealous. I hope we didn't git no blood on 'em, did we, Johnny?"

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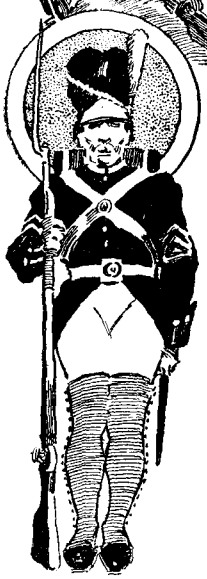
LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS

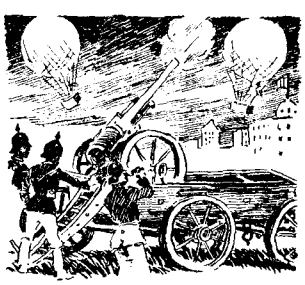


· LAST INDIAN CAMPAIGN ·

Some will be surprised to learn that the last Indian War of the U.S. Army was the Powder River campaign, and that it was fought as recently, believe it or not, as 1908.

· CONQUEST *and* TRADE ·

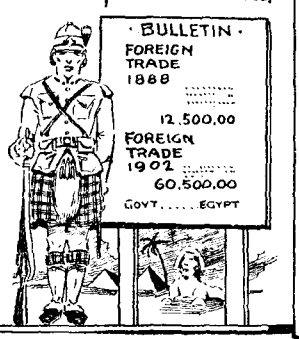
Contrary to general belief, conquest rarely has any adverse effect on trade. For example, during the first 14 years after Britain occupied Egypt, the latter's trade multiplied five times



The first gun designed to engage aerial targets was the German Balloon Gun. During the siege of Paris 1871, the French sent messages by balloons and the Prussians found ordinary field-guns useless for shooting them down, so made the new weapon.

· PIPE CLAY PARADE ·

This name, meaning a dress parade, had its origin in the days when white crossbelts were common army ornaments. Pipe clay was used to clean the belts, hence the term.



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They came to the cut in the wires. Schneider ducked stealthily through

A Touch of Java

A Javanese is a hard man to understand; you cannot always judge his courage from his soft-spoken docility, nor gauge his loyalty from the way the points on his turban are turned

By GEORGE MASSELMAN

Author of "Canned Judgment," "The Bosun Is a Bandit," etc.

INSPECTOR WELTERKAMP had the map before him, next to the newspaper. It was a map of a large city, cut in half by a river. There were many squares representing city blocks.

Occasionally he looked at the newspaper and finding there the name of a street he located it on the map and drew a heavy, black pencil line along it.

". . . They come from the East," he read, "hundreds of them, skimming the housetops . . ." He found another street-name, one he had played in as a boy long before he had come to the East Indies. Valiantly the town had defended itself it said, against infantry, war-vessels, parachutists even. All those the town had been able to cope with . . . but then had come the bombers.

Now he began to block out the squares between the black streets—they might as well be black because of what had hit them from the sky. Clearly he saw the teeming streets and the people he had

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known so well, decent people who had never harmed anyone. He could almost mention them by name even though he had not been back there for years, not since he had become police inspector in Sudaya.

The war had changed that too, because Sudaya was on the coast and here he was, some three hours fast driving into the interior, halfway up a mountain slope.

No sooner had the word been flashed that Holland had been invaded than all the Germans in the Islands had been rounded up and brought to this village which had been set aside as a prison camp. The army had been in charge and, having accomplished the task in record time, had settled back in its former routine of defending the coast line, turning the job of guarding the Germans over to the police.

Inspector Welterkamp was in charge of Camp Porrong Agoeng, where some five hundred men, women, and children were making themselves comfortable enough and were only reminded by a high, barbed wire fence that they were not free to come and go as they pleased.

He heard the faint groan of a car coming up the steep mountain road, the sound coming and going, but returning louder after each sharp turn. But he could not keep his eyes off the map, thinking of all the people he had known . . . good people who had never harmed anyone . . .

HIS native assistant, Pra Itomo, coughed politely. The inspector saw him in the doorway, a slight figure with the slender hands of a woman. His *sarong* fell to his feet, carrying the design which designated the district he came from; and his headcloth was meticulously pleated, as befitted a Javanese of his caste, the corner-points of his turban slanting downwards.

But Mynheer Welterkamp remembered that Pra Itomo had once carried those points up, audaciously, like all other members of that "society" which had preached the doctrine that Java was for the Javanese. And he wondered now if the *Sarikat Islam* had been completely dissolved and, if not, whether it might not want to take advantage of the trouble in the mother country.

"There is a car coming up the road, *tuan*," Pra Itomo said.

"I know. I expect Captain Van Dongen." The native turned to leave. "Pra," Mynheer Welterkamp said, hesitating a little because it was so easy for a Javanese to lose caste, "these are bad times. Loyalty and honesty seem to be at a premium. When I took you on as my assistant you swore an oath of fidelity to Holland. You will not forget it now?"

Pra Itomo looked toward the floor. "No, *tuan*," he said. "I will not forget it."

He withdrew and went outside, looking in the direction of the camp, a quarter-mile away. Then he went inside again to his own room, continuing his work on a number of sheets with names, all of them German.

But he barely looked at them; instead his eyes traveled through the window over the lowlands in the distance—over Java.

The captain acknowledged Mynheer Welterkamp's perfunctory greeting. At once he recognized the map on the table.

"A lot of people in Sudaya were doing the same thing this morning," he said. "Most of it must be in ruins. The bombers went at it systematically, the report says, back and forth like a lawn-mower . . ."

"Any special orders today, Captain?" Mynheer Welterkamp interrupted, pushing the map to one side. "The camp is quiet; everyone is settling down to their new routine. Fortunately Porrong Agoeng is a healthy spot; there is no sickness among them."

"Don't worry too much about their health, Inspector. These are war times. As long as no one gets out you are doing your duty and nobody will complain."

"I have a list of things which some of them would like to have sent up from the coast. They say the army gave them little time to pack."

"Yes, we picked them up in a hurry," the captain said, not without gloating.

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"We clamped down on them in one full swoop."

"Maybe you were in too much of a hurry."

"What do you mean? We found a lot of material—proof that underground work has been going on for months. Vast quantities of arms were smuggled into the Islands and we know now that they stored them at many strategic points. Not only that, but a lot of warehouses at coastal points, outwardly harmless enough, have foundations strong enough to serve heavy artillery."

"That is not new," the inspector said. "We knew it all along. Did you find out just where those caches are located, and the gun placements? Knowing they exist means nothing unless you can locate them. These Islands cover a couple of million square miles, you know."

The captain's face fell. "That's just it," he said. "We were successful enough in intercepting all their wireless messages during the past six months, but we never could break down the code they were using. To be frank, we counted on finding a clue when the invasion gave us a chance to arrest them but we didn't find a thing."

"That's because you fellows were in too much of a hurry," Mynheer Welterkamp said. "It would have been better to let some of them run loose for a while; they might have given themselves away. But, of course, the army does not believe in police tactics. They must always do things with a flourish."

"We know who sent them though," the captain retorted, unwilling to admit that the army might have blundered. "It is what I came to see you about. He is in the batch we sent up here, a man named Carl Schneider. He was known as a small importer, but it is only too obvious now that he was not dealing in dyestuffs and nails, but in continents instead."

"Pra!' the inspector called out. "Bring the list of Porrong Agoeng." In the adjoining room the voice travelled easily through the plastered bamboo wall. Pra Itomo picked up the list.

"YES, he is here," Mynheer Welterkamp said, running the row of names. "He is not even hiding the fact that he is sort of a leader. He is in the committee the prisoners set up among themselves to administer the camp. "And now that you brought him here, behind barbed wire," the inspector continued caustically, "he is protected from making any false move."

"I don't have to tell you that it would be of the utmost importance to have the key to those messages. They must have been relayed to Germany, and naturally contain all the information any attacker could wish to have if he attempted to invade these Islands. But if *we* had that information too, we could devise ways to counteract . . ."

"So all you want me to do is to get that code out of Schneider." Welterkamp's short laugh sounded ugly

The captain gestured.

"Why not? They themselves, did it time and again. Why couldn't you take a leaf out of their book?"

"I'll tell you why not!" Mynheer Welterkamp snapped back, the blood rushing to his face, "because I am not a Nazis . . . nor did I ever acquire the Oriental touch. If the army wants to put the screws on him you can damn well do it yourself. Even so, that fellow won't talk—you can see it in his eyes. I absolutely refuse to have anything to do with that kind of business."

"Not even after so many of our people have been murdered?" the captain said slowly. "I saw you look at the map. It is quite possible that somebody, very close to you . . ." He stopped when the inspector abruptly got up and turned his back on him.

He saw him stare out of the window, down the mountainside into the dazzling haze shimmering above the lowlands. He saw also how the muscles in his jaw stood out and pulsed slightly. The captain took his leave then, but the inspector barely acknowledged it, thinking instead of what the war was doing to ordinarily decent people. . . .

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THE routine of running the camp was simple. A detachment of militia was guarding it and the inspector paid it a visit only once a day, usually in the late afternoon. There had been no cause for trouble, or even friction.

The Germans, with their ingrained willingness to submit to authority, were gladly conforming to whatever rules had been set up by their own committee.

For the inspector this new job might almost have been a vacation it certainly was a welcome change to be on a mountain slope after his many years in the torrid lowlands. But it was impossible for him to think of his own good fortune when the imaginary drone of bombers was constantly in his head.

He wondered how many others were waiting for news from the home country, and waiting in vain. An invader did not bother to inform the vanquished of the plight of their kinfolk.

But even while knowing this they would still be waiting, each additional day a deeper stab of hopelessness and despair for what might have happened to a child sent to school in far off Holland, or to the parents who had been left behind . . .

Pra Itomo came to tell him that it was time to go to the camp. The inspector turned on him, almost fiercely.

"I won't go! I could not face them without forgetting that I am a decent man. You go."

"As it pleases the *tuan*," Pra Itomo said, bowing slightly, "Shall I take a sample of the water?"

"Yes, you might as well," the inspector said, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

On his way out Pra Itomo picked up an empty bottle.

He did not at once enter the camp but skirted the barbed wire fence which flanked one side of the road. From above a stream gurgled down the mountainside. He headed that way, holding up his *sarong* a little so as not to step on it.

He filled the bottle from the stream and for a minute looked down upon the camp. From his point of vantage he saw it all, the streets and the small houses. It looks clean, and well run, he thought.

He did not feel too sorry for them; their loss of freedom would not be long—no three hundred years as it had been with the people of Java . . .

THE committee received him at the gate. The one whom he knew to be *tuan* Schneider, whose name he had heard mentioned through the wall, asked why the inspector was not coming in person.

The German was a lean man with a sharp face. Pra Itomo explained that the *tuan* was upset, that he had received bad news.

Herr Schneider shrugged and indicated that he was ready to proceed with the inspection. Pra Itomo did not quite know whether he should walk ahead like the *tuan* inspector always did, or if he should remember that he was only a native.

He seemed a bit nervous about it and his hand fluttered aimlessly to his head cloth toying with the points of his turban.

He cast his eyes to the ground sedately as befits a native in the presence of whites. The German smiled almost imperceptibly and then he moved ahead along the village street, Pra Itomo following one step behind.

They looked into several of the houses. The women were cooking over charcoal braziers. Halfway through the inspection Herr Schneider dismissed the rest of the committee with a gesture as much as to say, "Don't bother about this. I'll handle it."

"Why did you fill that bottle?" he asked, while they retraced their steps.

"I took a sample of the water, *tuan*."

"Naturally. I saw you do it; I am not blind. But why?"

"The villages up above, *tuan*,"—Pra Itomo inclined his head towards a wall of green, high up against the mountan." There has been sickness there and the stream runs through them. The water is being tested for typhoid."

"Typhoid?" Herr Schneider exclaimed.

He looked at the Javanese more closely now, seeing the finely chiseled face which

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betrayed a long line of ancestors, and he also saw the headcloth folded in its precise manner. One point of it was slightly turned upward.

"What is your name?" he asked in a voice which was a mixture of contempt and friendliness.

"Pra Itomo, *tuan*."

"Be sure to report to me, Pra," Herr Schneider said. "I want to know if that water is contaminated." It sounded not at all like a request; it was an order.

"Yes, *tuan*, I will," Pra Itomo said demurely, and he backed away as was customary when leaving the presence of a European.

The guards opened the gate for him and he left, carrying the bottle with him. He felt ill at ease—the experience of being led around by a European had not been a simple one. Again his toying with the points of his headcloth proved his state of mind.

THE deep shadows of darkness settled quickly; they came rolling up from the lowlands, shrouding everything on their way. For a brief minute some light still hung around the mountain peaks in the distance and then that, too, was gone, awakening simultaneously the loud, raucous sound of the night. Animals, insects, all that had been hiding during the day, now dared to make their presence known in a great burst of sound.

At the administration house the guard told him that the *tuan* inspector was lying down. Pra Itomo could understand this. All night the *tuan* had been up, his ears glued to the loudspeaker, waiting hungrily for each word which came through the air from Holland. Not until the station had been silenced—suddenly, and right in the midst of an account of the surrender—had the *tuan* slowly raised his head, and thereafter he had sat with his head between his hands, staring into space.

Yes, Pra Itomo could easily understand that he needed sleep now.

He continued on down the road. Before he came to the dispensary he saw the path which led to the shortwave radio station. He was near enough to hear Ahmad Sindoran, his friend, send out some messages.

Pra Itomo concluded that he was asking about the belongings of the prisoners because the inspector had said that they needed them. He entered the path.

Wireless never failed to be a marvel to Pra Itomo and he admired a man like Ahmad Sindoran who could work it and understand the meaning of those high-pitched notes which to him sounded like the hissing in a den of snakes.

"Will you come back, Pra?" Ahmad said when Pra Itomo told him that he did not have much time just then to talk. "I shall be on duty until four in the morning. It gets lonesome having only the sky to talk to."

"I shall be back, Ahmad," Pra Itomo said.

At the dispensary he looked at the water through the microscope, adjusting the lenses and the mirror in just the proper fashion.

He compared the bacteria he found in his sample with a chart the doctor had left with him; he did this very methodically. His face grew tense but his hands remained steady. At last he got up, pouring out the remainder of the sample and carefully wiping the slides.

He hurried back to the camp.

"What do you want?" Herr Schneider asked, wiping his mouth and annoyed at being disturbed in his dinner.

"You told me to come back, *tuan*, and tell you about the water." Pra Itomo was apologetic; it was bad manners to interrupt a European while he was eating.

"Well, how did it come out? All pure?"

Pra Itomo dropped his voice. "The water is contaminated, *tuan*. The germ shows up clearly."

Herr Schneider gave a quick look around and saw that no one had been within earshot. He grabbed the native by the arm and pulled him into the shadows of a wall.

"Are you positive?"

"Yes, *tuan*."

"Gott in Himmel!"

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FOR a moment he lost his composure, but then he proved that it was not for nothing he was the *leader*. "Get the inspector," he ordered. "Call him at once. If we don't do something quickly the whole camp will be down with typoid. All would die like rats."

"The inspector is asleep, *tuan*," Pra Itomo protested meekly. "And he needs it: all night he was up, worrying about . . ."

The German had come a step nearer, threatening to punish the native for his vacillation. Pra Itomo backed away, moving into the light.

The sight of his headcloth made the European drop his hands.

Both points of the headcloth were sticking up. Earlier he had not been quite certain about it, but this time the sign was unmistakable . . . and the *Sarikat Islam* had been useful to him before.

"Wake the inspector, Pra," he said, patting him on the shoulder. "You must!"

After Pra had left, Herr Schneider rounded up the committee and told them the bad news. Their water had to be boiled. The people in the camp tried to accept the news stoically, and repress the fear which, like a spectre, had suddenly moved in with them behind the barbed wire.

Some had only been drinking tea or coffee and they were the least worried; but all the children, of course, had been drinking water and for them the fear was the greatest. They were the first to be given castor oil.

Before long the adults had to take it too; the committee insisted upon it. Also, all drinking was prohibited until a sufficient quantity of water could be boiled. Because of this ban and the fact that the castor oil was drying up the intestines, the thirst rose like an evil vapor over the camp.

The sight of the brook became a nightmare. And all this time Herr Schneider waited, pacing back and forth behind the gate. He was losing his temper because the inspector made him wait so long, but he was unable to gain so much as the attention of the native guards outside the barbed wire; they were under strict orders never to speak a word to the prisoners.

At last Pra Itomo returned, carrying a large can. But he came alone. He seemed flushed, as if the errand on which the German had sent him had not been an easy one, and one in which he had failed.

"The inspector refuses to come, *tuan*," he began. "He said there is nothing he can do anyway, except to give you more castor oil, if you want it."

He pointed at the can he had brought.

"We must have a doctor! Do you hear me?" Herr Schneider was rapidly losing control. "Prisoners of war have rights. Go back! Tell him he must come here at once."

It was another hour before Pra Itomo returned, an hour in which the panic within the barbed wire fence was rising to new heights.

Mothers had been the first to rebel against authority, concerned about the fate of their children. They prowled around the camp, stealing charcoal with which to boil the water, boiling it long and furiously to kill the dreaded germs.

Fights had broken out among them. The message which Pra Itomo brought this time was not designed to alleviate this situation.

". . . 'Did the German bombers think of the women and children when they destroyed our cities?' the inspector wants to know, *tuan*."

"So, that's it!" Herr Schneider exploded. "He is going to make us pay for that. He does not care whether we die like poisoned rats, our insides writhing with pain . . . all of us, women and children, too."

"I would not know, *tuan*," Pra Itomo said. "But the inspector says, he is naturally more concerned about the fate of his own relatives than he is about the prisoners.

"He is particularly worried about his old mother. He wants to know whether he has not the right to learn about her fate . . . whether she is alive, or dead. I believe, *tuan*, it is that which makes him act like he does.

"It is better to know for sure than to sit,

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and wait, and never to hear a thing. It *does* prevent a man from thinking clearly and confuses him when he has to decide between 'right and wrong'."

HERR SCHNEIDER had listened closely, and his mouth puckered as if he had seen the first glimmer of hope. He lowered his head, close to Pra Itomo's ear.

"*Sarikat Islam?*" he whispered.

"Yes, *tuan*. I once belonged to that society."

"We Germans have many friends among them, Pra Itomo," Herr Schneider said softly. "They know we shall some day liberate them from the yoke of the Dutch which has been on their shoulders for several hundred years. You know that, don't you?"

"I have heard it spoken of, *tuan*," the native said, almost inaudibly.

"You swore an oath to work for the *Society*."

"Yes, I did, *tuan*. But it was when I was young, and since then I promised to obey the laws of the Dutch."

"Nonsense," Herr Schneider said. "It is Java that counts. Not the Dutch. You cannot deny this."

Pra Itomo made no comment.

"Do you want these people to die? Of course, you don't. You are a Javanese, and they have a feeling for such things. You *must* help me, Pra Itomo."

"Only the inspector can help," the Javanese protested. "He could have water sent up from the lowlands, clean water. And he could get a doctor here quickly. In all that I am helpless. But the inspector is out of his mind. He can only think of getting news about his old mother . . ."

"That is just it, Pra. I could manage to get that information but for it I need your help."

Irresistibly, hollow-eyed mothers were coming nearer, sensing that this native was perhaps the only one who could help them. Herr Schneider barked at them in their own language and they backed away again.

After Pra Itomo had left, Herr Schneider spoke to everybody and he lessened their fears somewhat by promising that something was being done, and that by morning there would be clean water.

But in the meantime he insisted on more castor oil for everybody and he showed them the kind of leader he was by swallowing a big tumbler himself.

He went to his own quarters and stayed there, all by himself. When it was one o'clock he left the house and, making sure no one saw him, he moved stealthily toward the farthest corner of the camp.

He saw that in the string of lights, outside the fence, two had been extinguished, creating a deep shadow.

He felt in his pocket while crouching behind a large clump of ferns, making sure of having the paper on which he had coded the full name and address of Inspector Welterkamp's mother, just as Pra Itomo had given it to him. It was what Herr Schneider had worked over in his room referring only occasionally to some apparently innocuous marks in a pocket Bible and for the most part relying on what he had in his head.

He remained crouched behind the ferns, a smile playing around his mouth as he realized what a lucky break this typhoid scare was for the Fatherland.

THE sound of the *toke* was a bit more metallic than usual, and it repeated five times exactly. Schneider crawled to the fence and Pra Itomo guided him to a spot where the wires had been cut.

He crawled through it, following the native over a narrow path which quickly brought them among the trees. With each step his spirits rose.

When the army had raided his place in Sudaya, it had all happened so quickly that he had been unable to send off some last-minute reports about the work he had been doing. He had fretted about this ever since. And now he would be able to get them through and over a Dutch government station to boot, together with that silly request for news about the inspector's mother.

It was indeed fortunate for Germany, he

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thought, that there were still some soft-hearted people in the world, because otherwise it might not be so easy to conquer it. With his reputation in the homeland he felt certain that the authorities would make every effort to have the Red Cross telegraph the news about Mynheer Welterkamp's mother. The inspector could not help being grateful, and this would in turn would be reflected in his treatment of the prisoners . . .

When he saw the wireless mast he reached out and touched Pra Itomo on the shoulder. He noticed that the native was shivering.

"You are sure the wireless operator is not around?" he asked under his breath. His hands made a suggestive move.

"No, *tuan.*" Pra Itomo whispered back. "I told you I had managed to get him out of the way. He is my *friend.* You have half an hour. No one will come here."

Pra Itomo was crouching beneath the window outside the small building and from that short distance he saw the German *tuan* go through those strange and almost magic motions of sending.

He heard the sparks as they broke the circuit each time—that much Ahmad had been able to explain to him, also telling him that those sparks could but be heard some ten or twenty feet away, while the signals themselves, those that went through the air, had no sound at all until they landed on some distant receiver.

Frequently he peered over his shoulder into the darkness. As the signals kept up he became more and more nervous, reaching for the points of his headcloth again but making no attempt this time to push up the points, only touching them and feeling of the rosin he had put in.

At last, after an eternity, the sound of the small sparks stopped. It has taken a long time, Pra Itomo thought; the name and address of *tuan* Welterkamp's mother had been long, but not *that* long.

He had given it to the German, all neatly written out on a piece of paper. He wondered if they would have to wait for a reply. But the German was already at the door, calling softly and telling him to lead the way back to the camp.

"The reply will be cabled officially, through the Red Cross most likely," the German told him when Pra Itomo inquired how the Inspector was to hear about it. "I told 'them' how much depended upon it—the lives of hundreds of good Germans."

"It took a long time, *tuan,*" Pra Itomo ventured.

"Oh, I had a few more things to tell them," Herr Schneider said pleasantly. "You don't mind, do you?"

"No, as long as you asked about Mynheer Welterkamp's mother."

"Of course I did. That, also, was very important."

They came to the hole in the fence.

"Now I am quite willing to stay here for the rest of the war, Pra. I shall make no more demands upon you. But for this you will be duly honored in time to come."

"I hope so, *tuan,*" Pra Itomo said, refastening the wires where he had cut them.

MYNHEER WELTERKAMP opened his eyes, wondering if he had really heard a sound. He had taken some sleeping medicine to shut out the imagined drone of hundreds of airplane motors.

He listened. For a while he heard nothing but the cacaphony of the night; then he sat up.

A car was coming up the winding road, going in first because of the climb, and with the throttle wide open. He got out of bed and in his slippers moved down the hall, lighting his way with a flashlight. He saw it was five o'clock.

A drowsy sentry straightened to attention when he saw the beam of light come toward him. From the door the inspector looked down the mountainside wondering if, after all, it might not have been the bombers of his dream. But when he switched off the flashlight he saw a faint gleam on the road below, working its way around the curves.

He returned into the house wondering who could have such urgent business as to leave Sudaya at two in the morning.

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Going through the hall he played his light into Pra Itomo's room. Something on the back of a chair suddenly drew his attention and he approached it gingerly.

It was the native's turban which he had placed there no doubt to keep the pleats in place. Pra Itomo, himself, was stretched out on his mat, his black wavy hair for once in plain view. But Mynheer Welterkamp was more interested in the head cloth just them.

In the brief moment his beam had touched it he had seen how one of the points was sticking up. He told himself that he was seeing things; nevertheless, the evil days which had come upon the world entitled a man to be suspicious. And if this war would start things among the natives the *Sarikat Islam* was bound to have its hand in it; and Pra Itomo *had* been a member.

Furtively he reached out and touched the cloth. The feel of it made him grow tense . . . in the point there was the tell tale stiffness of excess rosin.

His eyes narrowed and he turned them on the native whom he had trusted implicitly for a good many years. He was about to awaken him when the sound of the approaching car made him turn.

Captain Van Dongen jumped out of the car before it had fairly come to a stop. "Where is Schneider?" he asked breathlessly, "Did he escape?"

"What the devil are you talking about," the inspector said pointedly.

"Those messages, man! We picked up another one, after midnight. We didn't get it all but enough to recognize the Schneider touch . . ."

Mynheer Welterkamp hurriedly climbed into the car, the captain following.

"To the camp," he called to the chauffeur.

In less than no time the gates moved into their headlights, proving at once that those behind the barbed wire were not as asleep as they were supposed to be. They were not making any noise, but they were awake. Two of them rushed forward.

"Water! Is the water coming?" one of them cried, but the inspector pushed him unceremoniously aside.

"I want Schneider," he ordered. "Bring him here at once." He was only slightly relieved when he saw the German appear.

"Were you outside the camp?" Mynheer Welterkamp asked severely.

Herr Schneider pulled himself up to his full height and he clicked his heels. "Yes," he said loudly. "I was at the radio station and I used it."

"You shall be punished for this." The inspector was fighting for control.

"You may change your mind about that," the German replied arrogantly "when you find out that I did it for you and hoping that it would change your mind about letting all of us die."

MYNHEER WELTERKAMP blinked and he passed a hand over his face, deciding finally that regardless of the sleeping medicine and his worries he still had all his senses.

"What are the prisoners dying of?" he asked bitingly.

"Typhoid, of course!" the German exploded. "You know it as well as I. You want to do nothing for us because you heard no news about your mother. But you *will* hear. I know you will. Today some time; just wait and see."

He came a step nearer and grabbed the inspector by the arm. "Will you give us pure water?" he begged.

"There isn't a thing wrong with your water," Mynheer Welterkamp snapped, shaking him loose. "As for my mother, she has been dead for ten years."

Herr Schneider stood as in a daze, only half seeing the car turn around and speed off. All color had drained from his face.

"He could not possibly have done it all by himself," the captain said. "He must have had someone to help him." Mynheer Welterkamp made no comment.

At the radio station Ahmad Sindoran had gone off watch and the relief operator did not have the slightest idea what the ***tuan*** inspector was talking about.

They wasted no time in getting back to

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the adminstration house, the inspector entering Pra Itomo's room and shaking him.

The Javanese struggled to his feet and, while still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, found himself looking at his own headcloth which the *tuan* inspector was waving menacingly before him. He realized all too well what this meant. He began to fumble in the folds of his *sarong*.

Finally he produced a piece of paper. "It is all there, *tuan*," he said.

The inspector took it and a look of incredulity crept into his eyes. Here was the name of his dead mother again, together with a long address. The rest was gibberish.

"It looks somewhat like the stuff Schneider was sending out," the captain said.

"It is, *tuan*," Pra Itomo assured him. "I made the German ask for news about the *tuan* inspector's mother, and I thought up an address which had most of the letters of the alphabet in it. While he was sending Ahmad Sindoran was in the bushes nearby, writing it all down. I heard you say you needed a clue for those code messages so I arranged to get it for you."

Mynheer Welterkamp started to say something but he saw Pra Itomo look at his headcloth—without it a Javanese felt himself to be only half dressed. He handed it over, but not until he had first folded down the points.

"Was there really something wrong with the water, Pra?" he asked, ignoring the captain who had started to break down the elusive code.

"No, *tuan*," Pra Itomo said, a little self-consciously. "It was pure as crystal, but I thought I might in a little way get even for what their bombers did to 'our' country."

"We better take a look at them, anyway, Pra," Mynheer Welterkamp said, leading the way. "They did not appear happy."

The first thing they heard when they arrived at the camp was that the leader, Carl Schneider, had hanged himself.

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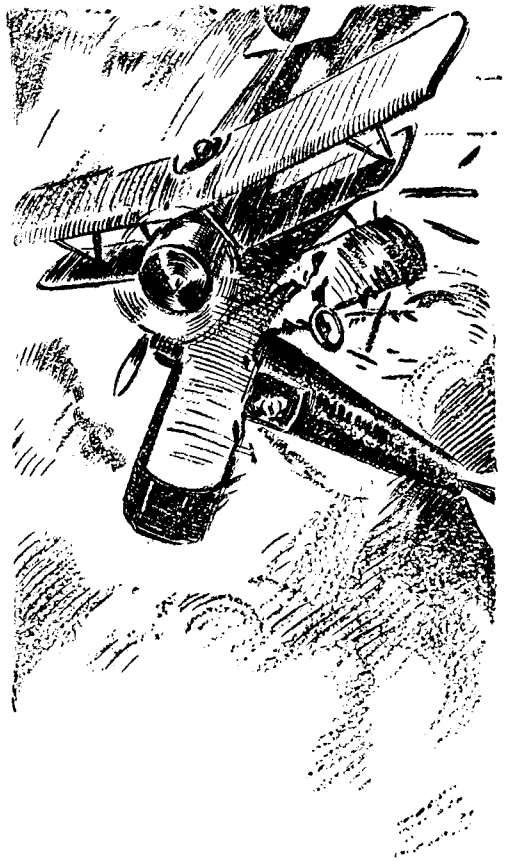

Fools Fly High

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

ALVIN NAGEL hated DAN MOORE because the latter knew no fear, and that hate brought Moore to disaster. Fixed with the responsibility for a crackup, accused of striking Nagel, his superior officer, Moore was court-martialed. The decision of the court was not then announced, but Moore knew his career in the Air Service was finished.

Two people believe in Moore and need him, JULIAN HOYT and his sister, THERESA, called Trick. Hoyt's dream is to make instrument flying safe—a wild dream in those early post-war years; his immediate scheme is to organize an air circus, with Dan Moore, legendary World War ace, the feature attraction. Moore is sick of flying, sceptical of Hoyt's theories about safety in the air; but eventually TRICK HOYT wins him over.

THE first recruits of the air circus are CAPTAIN PATRICK, pilot, and MIKE DENISKI, mechanic—both old friends of Moore's. Other pilots join—among them Alvin Nagel, still savagely eager to teach Dan Moore the meaning of fear. At first all goes well, and thousands flock to watch the daring maneuvers of the flyers, so brilliantly coached and led by Dan Moore. But soon trouble arrives, with Nagel behind it.

Towns visited by the Moore Aerial Circus report the depredations of pickpockets, the sale of poisonous liquor. It's easy to link this with one HOKE GIFFORD, a racketeer who is Alvin Nagel's friend and his pupil in the science of cards. Furiously angry, Dan Moore publicly threatens Nagel's life. That is a mistake.

NAGEL having deliberately broken up the formation maneuvers at one show, Moore relegates him to taking up passengers. Then, from the sky, Moore sees Nagel's plane falter, go crashing down. Landing swiftly, Moore finds the wrecked plane about to catch fire with the passengers trapped in it. And Nagel, who has climbed free, is

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shouting to the crowd that Moore filed the control-horn bolts to cause the crackup. Someone remembers how Moore threatened Nagel.

Captain Patrick gets Moore away from the lynch-crazy mob and forces him into a car. Left behind are Trick Hoyt and the blacksmith, JIM LOGAN, who have climbed up on the wing of the wrecked plane. But Dan Moore manages to break free from Patrick; he throws himself from the car and rushes back toward the crackup. Quickly he's recognized, and one of the crowd yells: "Here he comes! Get a rope and we'll hang him!" . . .

CHAPTER XXIX

VULTURES WANT SOUVENIRS

THE mob sounds were beaten down by a greater voice. Jim Logan had pulled himself up onto the wing beside Trick Hoyt. His tremendous weight had broken through the fabric, smashing the frail ribs. He had wrenched the control horn from the aileron where it had hung, dangling uselessly, the retaining bolts sheered. He held it aloft.

"Listen, you blasted fools!" he roared. "You all know me; Jim Logan, the blacksmith. Nobody filed these bolts. They crystallized." He pointed to the girl. "Good thing there was somebody with brains enough to look."

Dan Moore slowed from his limping run. Al Bibbs had whirled the Packard and was returning. "Climb on," he ordered Dan.

"I must of busted some ribs," Moore muttered, stepping painfully onto the runningboard.

It was a strange thing that had happened. A moment before that crowd had been a mad, unthinking beast, eager to kill. In that short space it had dissolved into its component parts; individual human beings who could be reasoned with.

Logan's hoarse, booming voice challenged them. "You're a bunch of crazy fools! Tom and his kid ain't hurt much. And Moore didn't file these bolts. Nobody did. They crystallized."

Bibbs moved slowly through the crowd, pounding the rubber bulb of his horn to clear a path.

Moore looked around. He could see now that the front cockpit was empty. And Nagel had disappeared. A man stood on the crumpled left wing, trying with a savage violence to wrench a strut from its fittings. A wide streak of blood gleamed scarlet down his left cheek.

"What's the idea?" Moore demanded. "Where're those passengers?"

"I'm one of 'em. Me an' my kid," the man answered, belligerently. "I want this stick here for a souvenir of our wreck. An' I'm gonna have it too."

A voice caught that up. "Let's get a souvenir from it!"

There was a dry rasp of tearing cloth. A man on the other side of the fuselage raised and triumphantly waved a long banner of doped fabric. "I got some of the silk," he shouted.

It was like a signal. The crowd poured over the wrecked plane. Women, men and children fought with each other to get a part of it.

Trick Hoyt and Logan had joined Dan, near Al's car.

"They'll ruin the Standard!" Trick cried.

"Not much left to ruin," Dan told her, ruefully.

"But why do they do it! What good are those things to them?"

He looked at her. "Blessed if I know, Trick." His voice echoed her wonder. "Once I flew out to a ship that'd crashed and burned. Not a gasoline fire; not enough to burn the pilot's skeleton. The people were stealing his bones, for souvenirs. That's God's truth."

Dan turned on Bibbs. "You're hired, Al," he told him. "You and Logan cut that Hall-Scott free and you haul it to Riverport, other side of the Cascades. We'll establish a base field there." He put his hand on Logan's massive shoulder. "Much obliged, partner," he said. "I think maybe they'd have strung me up, if it hadn't been for you an' Al." He added: "And if Trick hadn't thought to look at that control horn."

"Hell, we wasn't tryin' to save your

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life," Bibbs grumbled. "We—come on, Jim let's get that motor 'fore they swipe it."

Trick called after him. "Sometime somebody's going to catch you doing a good deed, Al. Won't you be embarrassed!"

She faced Moore. "Well, Dan?" she questioned, her voice subdued.

He shrugged. "We'll go on to Everett and Bellingham. Curt's already posted those towns. There's an airplane factory in Seattle where we may be able to pick up repair parts. That is, if you and Red still want to go on with this craziness."

"We're just starting," she assured him. "If necessary we can sell our home to keep going." Her determined voice softened. "Dan, I saw you jump out of the car and start back here. Did you do that because of—because your were afraid they would hurt me?" A slow flush mounted in her face. Her hand, on his arm, was trembling.

His eyes were puzzled. "What difference does it make?" he asked. He patted her shoulder. His voice changed, and with it the quality of his smile. "Trick, you oughta know by this time that all flyers are crazy as bedbugs. I don't know why I do things."

DAN MOORE stood outside the rough-board hangar that Al Bibbs and a gang of carpenters had erected on this field, east of Riverport. In the distance the irregular skyline of the Riverport business district was painted with the golden, dreamy light of late Indian summer. Dan had a letter in his hand that he'd brought out with him from the hotel. It was from Major Antai, commanding officer of the army training field in Florida.

The letter was personal, and quite long. Dan re-read one of the paragraphs, his eyes squinted in thought:

> General John Marks, artillery, overseas, is now a staff officer of the department and happened to be the officer reviewing your case. He refused to endorse the findings of the court-martial and has written, asking that I use my influence as your commanding officer to have a re-trial of the case.
>
> Confidentially, I believe the general is remembering an instance in the late war when a certain combat flyer shot down a line of observation balloons near Lens, saving from complete destruction a battalion of artillery under Marks' command.
>
> At least the general mentioned that in his personal letter to me and also your landing from that flight, badly wounded and with the wings almost shot off your plane.

Dan was smiling broadly. "I'll say they were almost shot off," he muttered, his memory omitting the agony of the explosive machine-gun bullet that had struck his thigh. That flight seemed to have happened a century ago. "Landed her on the parados of the Limey frontline trench. Both wings fell off as those crazy Scotchmen came swarming toward me. And did I get drunk before they got me to the first dressing station!"

He laughed outright. "A kilty followin' on each side of my stretcher, with a bottle: 'Ha' another wee drap, Yank, for-r tha gr-rand show ye gie us.'"

"That's the first time I've heard you laugh in ages," Trick said, coming up behind him. "Good news in the letter?"

"No," Dan told her. "No. It's from Major Antai. I may get a re-trial for striking Nagel, if the major and another officer can put it over."

Unconsciously her eyes moved to the group who were playing cards, on the sunny side of the hangar. Nagel was dealing. Pat had a thick sheaf of bills near his right hand, weighted down with some silver dollars.

Her eyes came back to Moore's face. "Why isn't that good news, Dan? This new trial may clear you."

He made a gesture of impatience. "Don't you see, Trick, that I don't mind getting court-martialed for striking Nagel? It's that other stuff that they got into the records of the trial. Nagel's claim that I caused Best to crash, and everything that supports that claim. That's why those officers at McCulley's field wouldn't even speak to me, after they found out who I was."

"Then you won't go back for a new trial?"

He shrugged. His voice was bitter. "I may have to. But there's no new evidence

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to bring out. Just a rehash of the old. Days and days of it. And the best I can hope for in the end is a minor change in their findings. That's not going to clear my name."

"I suppose not," she agreed. Again she glanced over toward the card game. Nagel had gotten in that morning with his Elly cabin plane that Mike Deniski had had repaired and left for him at Craig Point. Pat had told her that he was going to make his try that afternoon, with his marked cards.

CHAPTER XXX

ALL ACES CAN'T FLY

SHE could hardly keep the excitement from her voice. That big stack of currency by Patrick meant that their plan might succeed. "Dan," she asked, "if Nagel admitted, before witnesses, that he hadn't told Best—that would be new evidence, wouldn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

She hurried on. "It would show that Nagel had lied in that one instance; that his evidence was perjured. It would break down the whole case. It would support your claim that he said those things that caused you to strike him."

Nagel's voice reached them. "Patrick, you're having the luck of the devil today."

Dan was smiling at her, as though she were a child. "Now, Trick, why in the world would Nagel make any admissions like that?"

Young Jackson sauntered up, his helmet in one hand, slapping his boot. "How's to get one of the T.M's. for a little flyin', Dan?" he asked.

"They're all grounded for overhaul, since that farce air show we put on at Bellingham," Moore said, distastefully. "All but Pat's."

Jackson pointed to a ship, tumbling above them in the clouded sky. "You let Jack Muter fly whenever he wants to," he complained. "You're sore at me about something, Dan."

Moore rubbed his eyes. It was a gesture of weariness. "I'm not sore at you, kid. But we've only got five of those scouts left. And you're pretty reckless, kid."

Jackson's face tightened with anger. "I don't fly any more reckless than you do."

"Maybe not," Dan agreed, reasoningly, "but I've been at it quite a bit longer than you, kid. And as far as Jack Muter's concerned, he's testing out these LaRhones as Mike gets them overhauled. That's the only reason he's flying."

"Pat'll loan me his crate," Jackson snapped. "You're playing favorites with Muter. I can fly as good as him an' I'll show you."

Trick watched Jackson approach the card game. She heard Charley Wentworth's voice: "By me. Did you pirates bring your horse pistols and cutlasses?"

Pat was riding high. "Sure," he told Jackson, heartily. "Take her up. But if you groundloop or pull her outta riggin' I'll skin you alive, kid."

Al Bibbs came out and swung the prop for Jackson.

"I wish Pat hadn't loaned him that ship," Dan complained.

Trick spoke, her eyes still on the card game. "Dan, if your name should be cleared in the Army—what would you do? I mean, would you go back in?"

"It's not going to be cleared," he said, bitterly.

"But let's just say it will be."

He was thoughtful. "I don't know, Trick. This air circus has been grief, from start to finish. But—"

"But what, Dan?"

He grinned. "I think maybe I've gotten a kick out of being in full charge of it. Big frog in a little puddle, eh?"

"There are smaller frogs in smaller puddles."

"Well, in the Army, Trick, you never are complete boss. Always somebody higher up. You're like a kid, hanging onto the trailing ends of the lines, trying to make yourself think you're driving the horses . . . Look at that Chandelle! I've told Jackson never to Chandelle those T.M's. By the lord Harry, he's grounded for the rest of the season. An' if he don't like it he's fired."

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A BLACK Haynes limousine shoved its long hood up to the corner of the repair hangar and stopped.

Pat's voice was raised: "An' up you two thousand dollars for a look, Nagel, you yellow belly."

Nagel's voice was smooth. He was smiling, despite his heavy losses. "Why call me names, Patrick, while you're winning? I haven't the money to cover that raise. And you know it."

"I'll call you all the names I want to. The only courage you have is in a card game. An' I'm wondering if you have it then. Enough of it for a *real* bet."

Nagel sat up straight, on the other side of the improvised card table. "Just what do you mean by that, Patrick?" he asked, his voice deadly.

Trick clutched Moore's arm. "It's coming, Dan," she said, her voice quavering. "Pat's getting him angry on purpose."

But Moore's eyes were lifted toward the two planes that circled above. He had been oblivious to all but them. "That damned Jackson is going to try combat with Muter!" he said, in a harsh, strained voice. "And Muter's already sore at him."

"I mean," Patrick told Nagel, "that if it came to betting all you had—*everything*—you'd turn yellow."

Trick left Moore's side, moving toward the card game.

Nagel's lips were twitching with that cold, insane anger. "Name your bets, Patrick."

A dark, handsome young man in golf clothes had gotten out of the big Haynes. He came over to Moore. "Can you tell me if Theresa Hoyt is out here?" he asked.

Moore was silent, not hearing the question. The newcomer frowned. His eyes lifted to the airplanes. "What's wrong?" he asked, sensing Moore's tenseness.

"Here's your bet, Nagel," Pat said, over at the card game. "All I've got here against one thing—the truth from you about Best's crackup, in Florida."

Nagel's face muscles jerked involuntarily. He moistened his lips; quick, darting movements of his tongue. "The truth about Best's crackup," he repeated in a brittle voice. "You mean—"

"I mean, did Dan Moore influence Best in any way that caused him to crash that night?"

Nagel's voice was scarcely above a whisper. "I see. I see," he repeated. A small smile twitched the corners of his lips. "That would be a real bet, Patrick."

"Yeah," Pat said contemptuously. "Too big for your nerve."

"But how," Nagel inquired, "would you know that I was telling you the truth?"

"That's the only decent thing about you. You pay your gambling debts."

Nagel's eyes never dropped from Patrick's hard gaze. "How much have you got there?" he asked, nodding at Pat's winnings.

"I came here with thirty-two hundred dollars. The rest I won from you."

"Yes. Yes, that's right. You know, Patrick, there's something funny about this game. I mean, it's queer you happened to have such a wad with you." His voice slowed. "It looks just a little bit like a plant to me."

Above them an airplane engine ripped out a burst of sound.

"Then you're goin' tuh back down, huh? I thought you would!"

"No, Patrick. I'm not going to back down. But I'm afraid you are, because I'm going to make you bet every damn thing you own against the truth on Best. It's that or no dice."

Pat waved his hand at the pile of currency. "There it is. That's all and more than I own."

"You own that Thomas Morse scout you bought from the Hoyts."

Pat looked beyond the hangar, forgetting for a moment that he had loaned his plane to Jackson. He raised his eyes then. Jackson had just pulled out of a tight loop around Jack Muter.

"All right," he agreed. He shoved his money out toward the jackpot. "That Thomas Morse goes along with it. Remember! The truth of whether Moore had anything to do with Best's crash."

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"You'll get the truth, all right. If you win."

BOTH men were smiling, now that the bet was made. Trick, certain until this moment that Pat would win, felt a sudden shock of alarm, a premonition of disaster.

Very carefully, one by one, Nagel arranged his hand, face up on the table. Ace of hearts; king of hearts; queen, jack, ten —of hearts.

Pat looked at them in stunned silence. He placed four eights on the board, still staring at Nagel's royal flush.

Nagel watched him. There was a quick movement of his tongue over smiling lips. "You didn't know it, Patrick," he said, "but we stopped playing with your cards on the last deal." He laughed outright. "If you'd only had brains enough to check the backs of your own cards, or the discard!"

Patrick started to his feet, his face working.

With a sudden movement Nagel raked the money over with his left hand. "I have a gun here in my pocket," he said, coldly. "It would be self-defense."

In the dead silence that followed Moore's voice came to them, catching their attention with its urgency.

"Al, help me get the FG started! Muter won't stand for any more monkey business from that damned kiwi."

Trick's eyes lifted to the airplanes above them. One of the ships was in a dive, seemed headed straight down toward the other.

The lower plane dove suddenly, came back in an Immelmann turn.

"That's Jack Muter," Wentworth said carelessly. "He won't hurt the kid."

But Muter's sudden change in direction had confused young Jackson. He pulled out of his dive, trying to jerk it up in a quick loop. He failed to catch the gyroscopic effect of the rotary engine.

From the ground they saw it falling off to the right. Jackson must have booted full left rudder. The plane hung, a little past vertical, stalling.

Suddenly the tail swirled, in answer to the rudder. The plane whip-stalled. He was in an inverted tailspin.

Al Bibbs was struggling with the big club prop of the FG.

"Lay off, Al," Moore shouted. "The kid's in an outside spin! Nothing I can do."

Muter had jerked his plane into a vertical, trying frantically to get from under the spinning ship.

Trick saw Pat's clenched fists raised above his head in a strange, tense gesture. She looked back at the ships.

The two ships met. One wing of Jackson's crumpled back against the fuselage. A black object parted from the wreckage, gathering tremendous speed in its fall.

"Threw his engine!" Wentworth exclaimed.

All of these things had happened in comparative silence. Now the slow-traveling sound came to their ears; the splintering impact, the ripping of wood and fabric, the high, thin scream of wind through falling wreckage.

Jackson's plane dropped, wings whipping the fuselage.

Muter's followed, more slowly. Both wing panels on his plane seemed intact. But the aileron control rods or elbows must have been jammed.

Jackson's plane struck on the far side of the field, flattening instantly to rags and kindling wood.

None of them moved. Their eyes were held on the awful, heartbreaking spectacle of Muter's struggles.

Twice he flattened out of the uncontrolled dives. But as he lost the terrific speed his nose dropped again, out of control.

The sound of his crash came as an echo to that of Jackson's.

They all stood immobilized with horror. All but the young man in golf clothes. He had seen the Hoyt girl.

"Theresa!" he called and moved toward her.

She saw him then and stumbled forward to meet him. "Dick! Oh, it's horrible, Dick!"

He put his arms around her shoulders

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and for a moment she stood, her face tight-pressed against his jacket.

Dan Moore had been watching them, his face wooden. He whirled on the others now. "Mike, throw some crash tools in Al's car! Nagel, drive to the nearest telephone and call an ambulance! They'll be dead. Both of 'em."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GOLD BLOCKHEAD

"IT'S about the only thing to do," Moore said, facing Trick Hoyt and her brother. "The only sensible thing. Wentworth has an angel backing him in Los Angeles. He'll pay seventy-five dollars apiece for the T.M's., eight hundred for the Sperry wing and he's offered me five thousand for the FG."

"If this is a business meeting," the young man said, "I'd better chase myself along." He had brought them to the hotel in his Haynes, after Jackson's and Muter's bodies had been cleared from the wreckage and loaded into the police ambulance.

Trick grasped his hand, a movement that Dan saw and judged. "No, please stay, Dick!" She tried to smile. "This is Dick Thatcher," she told them. "I forgot to introduce him. We—we're college friends."

"Yes," Dan said, in a leaden voice. That one word carried a depth of understanding.

Red's freckles stood out in his white face. "You'll—this will sound crazy to you, Dan. But I can fly by instruments. For several days now I've been using them almost entirely, except for landings and take-offs."

Moore's lips compressed. "Will you forget that drivel! This isn't small-boy play stuff, Red. We've got some cold facts to face. Whether it was Nagel or whatever it was, this whole circus has been a failure. Now there aren't enough ships left to even make a circus."

Pat was sitting by the window, staring outside. "It was Nagel," he said, beating a fist into open palm. "He knew all the time that I was laying for him with a marked deck. What a fool I was! He kept that other deck with him, that was exactly the same, except for back design. Then he switched 'em on me."

Dan said, impatiently: "Forget that penny-ante game!"

Pat's anger turned on his friend. "Penny-ante! D'you call losin'—"

"Dan wasn't paying any attention to the card game, Pat," Trick interposed, hurriedly, with a warning in her voice. "About selling those scouts, Dan. I'd favor that. But not the Sperry wing."

"I've got my instruments in that," Julian Hoyt said, stubbornly.

"But Red," Dan protested, "don't you understand that we're broke? That bad weather ruined our tour of Washington. Now winter's almost here. And these few crates we've got wouldn't impress the people in California. Not one bit. They're used to seeing airplanes down there."

Dick Thatcher spoke. He reminded Dan of an eagerly friendly, clumsy Newfoundland dog. He was so big and healthy, so young and enthusiastic. "Here's an idea," he proposed, thrusting fingers through his mop of curly black hair. "There's a gang of ski hounds out at my place. That rain in Washington was snow up in the Cascades. Fine skiing, if it hasn't melted too much. I'll hire you to fly the whole caboodle of 'em up to our lodge."

He over-rode Moore's protests. "There's a big, smooth meadow up there for landings. It'll give you something to do; give you folks time to plan things." His enthusiasm dominated the room. In their present state of dejection he was like a tonic. "Come on, all of you," he commanded. "We'll go out to our shanty and meet the gang."

THE "shanty" was a tremendous, rambling structure of granite, that overlooked the city, that was surrounded by acres of smooth lawn and scrubs.

Servants moved among the bright lawn furniture, serving drinks, and there was the lively, excited chatter of young people. Dan Moore sat in one of the striped canvas chairs and watched and listened in a removed state of mind.

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Trick fitted into this scene exactly. It was strange how he had taken her so much for granted, not wondering about her background. Their talk of the campus, of the fraternity and sorority college life, bewildered him. For them it was all fresh, as though it had been yesterday.

There had been none of that in the stodgy little college he'd attended. And a war had stretched between his college days and the present. A war that had left its marks on him. He felt old and neglected.

A white-haired man with the vigorous stride of youth took a chair beside Dan. "Cigar?" he asked, extending a handsome leather case. "They're five centers," he warned, as Dan took one of them.

"That's about my speed," Dan said, lighting it and holding the match.

But the other had shredded his and was stuffing it into a battered, short-stemmed pipe.

"Look at 'em," he chuckled, motioning toward the others, "Crazy as hoot-owls!" He got the damp cigar tobacco going finally. "Hey!" he shouted to one of the servants, "bring us a *real* drink, Pete."

The servant appeared to understand.

"Yes, sir," he said, blowing out a cloud of rank smoke, "crazy as hoot-owls. An' just about as much use. My kid don't know a cross-cut saw from a peavey. An' don't care. But what t'hell. Jest 'cause I had to pull my breeches on 'fore daylight's no sign my kid's got to."

"Did you want me to bring the bottle, Mr. Thatcher?" the servant inquired, standing with a tray and two small glasses.

"Hell, yes. D'you think this gent's a thimble man?" "Say," he turned on Dan. "Your name's Moore, ain't it? Mine's Block Thatcher—Blockhead, 'cause I can climb a spar tree with a tail-block for ballast, an' ain't got no better sense than to do it."

The servant had brought a bottle, innocent of labels or revenue stamps. Blockhead smacked his lips. "Cougar sweat," he stated. "Drink up. I got six ten-gallon kegs of it down in the rootcellar—the basement."

It was the best moonshine Dan had ever tasted. And he needed a drink, badly. And after the first three he decided that he needed a lot of them.

HE TALKED and Thatcher talked, spinning yarns, bolstering their new friendship with the good moonshine. The difference between flying and logging narrowed and became unimportant. Blockhead told a story of the drive that jammed in the white water of Salmon river, and how he'd ridden a log through the rapids above, a case of dynamite lashed to his back for blasting the key log of the jam.

That reminded Dan of the crazy theory that he and a mechanic observer had about some German mine operations. How he'd tried to convince the G2 that there could be no creek where the air photos showed one. And how, finally, he and the mechanic had stolen three cases of entanglement demolition tubes from a French ammunition dump and bombed that creek with them and revealed it as painted canvas camouflage, that concealed a swarm of German sappers.

Each listened patiently to the other until his turn came.

Occasionally there were interruptions from the others. Pat came, insisting that Dan perform his famous Russian Abdul dance for them. Pat always wanted that, after two drinks.

But it was a barracks dance, a wild thing of handsprings and nose dives, with apparently miraculous escapes from a broken neck. With his present mood of great age Dan felt it beneath his dignity.

Blockhead ordered a fresh bottle of cougar sweat and, each of them clutching a bottle by the neck, they wandered down to the seclusion of the tiled swimming pool.

Sprawled out comfortably on a huge, long rustic bench of logs, they drank and yarned and agreed and disagreed on the meaning of life. And finally they both took their shoes off and they tore the rustic bench apart. They needed the large base log, so that Block could teach Dan how to ride it in the pool.

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CHAPTER XXXII

WE KILLED THAT COUGAR

IT WAS almost noon the following day before Dan awoke and let Pat into his hotel room, to keep him from breaking down the door.

"Red's cracked up," Pat told him.

Moore felt cold horror. His first thought was for Trick. "Does Trick—where's Trick?" he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"Take it easy, Dan. He wasn't killed. Just scratched up a bit."

Moore sank down onto the bed, with a great, quivering breath of relief.

"Engine conked on him over the willows. Kid did a fine job of settin' her down in the river."

"The Sperry wing?"

"Yep. Just about ruined. Mike saved Red's instruments all right and he's tryin' to fish out the OX, but that engine's not going to be worth two bits."

Pat sat down then, facing his friend. "Dan," he said, after a long pause, "you haven't been treatin' Red very good. That kid's got a lot on the ball, Dan."

"Who said he hasn't?"

"Well, the way you've been treatin' him about those instruments—it's like he was a two-year-old baby."

"Damn those instruments! That's all I hear. Flyin' when you can't see the ground. Flyin' in all kinds of weather. Regular, scheduled passenger lines—that kind of junk. Even a two-year-old kid should know better."

Pat spoke in a slow, thoughtful voice. "I don't know about that, Dan. I've flown with the kid. He really—"

"Hell's bells! Have you gone soft-headed, too?"

Pat shrugged. "Let's drop that. The thing is, Dan, you've made fun of him so much that you drove him right into Nagel's arms."

"What d'you mean by that, Pat?"

"I mean that he and Trick have mortgaged or sold their home in Craig Point. And this morning, after his crackup, Red bought half interest in Nagel's Elly. Mike's busy putting Red's instruments into it right now."

Dan went over to the washbowl, examined his unshaven face in the mirror. "Maybe it's just as well," he said, after awhile. "That lets me out."

He sat down in the armchair, staring out of the window. Yes, that let him out. And now what? The Army? That thought was repugnant to him. Even if he could get back into it with his old commission, which was impossible. That re-trial wouldn't cover up the recklessness that was on his record.

And the other things . . .

He reviewed it all and the part that Alvin Nagel had played in it. It was startlingly clear now, how the other had bested him at every turn.

And this was the end of it. Nagel must have been aware, even before himself, that he loved Theresa Hoyt. It seemed now to Moore that he had loved her from the first moment of that meeting outside the operations office on the Florida field. Nagel should be satisfied, willing to leave him alone now that he had separated him from everything worthwhile.

HE GOT up slowly, and in a hopeless, mechanical way arranged his shaving outfit and put a fresh blade into the razor.

"Say, old man Thatcher's quite a boy, huh?" Pat said. "Remember him sayin' that you'd make the best high-climber in the world?"

Dan nodded, smiling faintly. "I like his kind, Pat. He's a real guy."

"Yeah. An' he thinks you're aces, too. Say, for looks that boy of his could give Valentino a run for his money, huh?"

Dan grunted, dragged the razor savagely down his cheek. Trick wanted a husband with a business that was anchored to the ground. That was what she'd said. Well, the lumber business was certainly anchored to the ground. And with as much money as they had it didn't matter if young Thatcher wasn't interested in logging.

There was a knock at the door. Pat opened it and Dick Thatcher came in, grinning, brimming over with good humor.

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"Hear what Red did?" he asked, as though it were a grand joke.

Dan nodded. "And that about winds up the Moore Aerial Circus," he said.

"What of it? We're starting an aerial express and passenger service to Seattle."

Dan gave him a pitying smile. "On what?" he inquired. "They don't sell these commercial jobs for cigar coupons."

"Say," Thatcher protested, "you met his nibs during pleasure hours. Don't let that fool you. Dad's one of the smartest business men on the coast, Moore. And he thinks you're God's gift to aviation."

"You mean, he thought that last night," Dan said, laying the hot towel to his face.

Thatcher's expression changed. "Drunk or sober, my dad is a good judge of men," he stated. "Or at least he *was*."

Pat broke in hurriedly "Don't get hot under the collar, Thatcher. Dan's not saying anything against your father. Just before you came in he was saying what a swell gent he thought he was."

Thatcher's voice warmed. "You bet he is! But before we start the ball rolling on this airline thing, you've got to haul that bunch up for skiing. I've already promised them that."

"My FG only carries one passenger," Dan objected. "It would take a couple of days to fly them all up."

"We'll take the Elly. Red owns half interest in it now. Nagel's off to Seattle to look over a commercial airplane that the Boeing company is putting out."

"Nagel would be in on this airline thing you're talking about?"

"Wel-l, not exactly. I just mentioned it to him this morning. Seems to be a smart man. He agrees with me that—"

"Yeah," Dan interrupted. "Nagel is a very smart man."

Thatcher went on:

"Of course there's nothing definite. His nibs wants to talk it over with you. Hasn't made any promises yet, but—"

"I'll fly your bunch up there," Dan interrupted shortly. "Pat, you tell Mike to get the Elly ready. I'll be out soon's I get some food in me."

IT WAS a forty-five minute trip up to the Thatcher lodge, on the west flank of Mount Taver. Dan made the first trip, carrying only Dick Thatcher with him in the cabin ship. It was the first time he'd flown the Elly and the field up there was at eight thousand elevation, which would mean a fast landing.

But the strip of meadow was, as Dick had said, smooth, and with plenty of length to it. After that he made trip after trip, carrying three each time, boys and girls.

There was a low, heavy ceiling of clouds over the Riverport area. But these broke near the mountain and the sun struck down on a scene of breath-taking grandeur. The snow-covered mountain was a splendid thing of carved alabaster, framed with the dark green of the lower forest.

Each time he returned to the Riverport field Trick had three more people ready and waiting for him. She was dressed in the dark green pull-on sweater, the beret and plaid skirt that she wore so much around the field. From this he judged that she wasn't going on the skiing trip.

He didn't talk to her any more than necessary but he was aware that often she scrutinized him, a small frown of worry coming to her smooth brow. Once she got into the plane, sitting beside him on the small folding seat, her gray, bronze-flecked eyes shadowed.

"What's wrong, Dan?" she asked. The engines were running and she had to lean near to him. "Have I done anything—something that you don't approve of?"

He dropped his hand onto hers. He felt the pressure of slender fingers.

They had often held hands this way, for a short space. It was almost like brother and sister. It was a comforting gesture of friendliness and understanding. But now . . . He cleared his throat. "Of course you haven't done anything, Trick. Anyway, who am I to approve or disapprove?"

She smiled, the thick, dark lashes framing her eyes. "Who are you? You're Dan Moore. I don't know of anybody I'd rather have approve of me. But there's something, Dan. Aren't you going to tell me?"

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He shook his head. "It's—there's nothing wrong, Trick. And don't worry about me approving of you. I'll always do that."

Her hand tightened convulsively on his. "Dan, that sounds—it's almost as though you were saying goodbye!"

Yes, it was a farewell to her, he thought, as he taxied out onto the field with another load of young people. That would be the last time that he could allow himself alone with her.

Trick's conception of their relationship must be so different from his. She probably considered him as an older brother. The thought startled him. That was exactly how he had felt toward her. That is, until—but no, he had always loved her. It was just that he was too blind to recognize his true feeling.

Knowing that now he couldn't trust himself alone with her again, he'd say something. He wasn't one of these romantic martyrs; those duffers with their noble promises of being like a brother, of carrying their love silently to the grave. He'd say something and make a fool of himself. And that would hurt Trick. The memory of it might spoil this love between her and Dick Thatcher. Trick's mind ran deep; she was fiercely loyal to her friends and in a way she might feel indebted to Dan.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BETTER TO WALK THAN FLY

DAN was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he had paid scant attention to the passengers on this trip. He was surprised, after landing on the meadow, to have a slender little grayhaired lady crowd up to the seat beside him. She was dressed like the others in sweater and jacket and heavy woolen skirt, with laced hightop boots. Her face gave an impression of youth and a whimsical sense of humor.

"I'm Mrs. Thatcher," she said, "and you needn't tell me who you are because Dad says"—her voice deepened in mimicry—"you're the best damned two-fisted drinker he ever run across."

Dan laughed, his head thrown back, remembering that log-rolling contest the evening before. "And you're the handsomest girl I've carried today," he complimented her. "Aren't you and Block ever going to grow up and be respectable?"

She nodded her head, a quick, birdlike gesture. "I like you, too," she announced. "Dad's always right about men."

She laid her hand on his arm, her eyes searching his, studying his face. "This flying is *so* new though! Remember, Dan, it's not a thing to be taken lightly—the trust of a man like my husband."

Dan nodded slowly in agreement. "You're thinking about that airline talk," he guessed. "Don't you worry, Mrs. Thatcher."

Dan had thought this would be the last trip. But when he got back to the Riverport field Block Thatcher was waiting. And there was a girl with him. A girl in a mink fur coat with a perky little mink hat cocked on one side of her pale, golden hair.

It was the first he'd seen of this particular girl. In some manner she conveyed an immediate impression of wealth and frailty. Like an orchid. Dan corrected this thought. Rather, like a spray of gardenias, still carrying the artificial dew of a florist shop.

She and Trick Hoyt were arm in arm. They were both beautiful, in their different ways. But Trick had a depth, a vital something that paled the other girl's beauty and made her seem almost commonplace.

Trick introduced her. "This," she said impressively, "is Nancy. Nancy Frawn. And before she turns loose on you Dan, I'll explain that she's a flirt, a heartless little nincompoop and that I love every inch of her, just as you probably will before the clock strikes five."

"Five!" Nancy exclaimed in a bell-like soprano, "is it five o'clock, sweetness? And my train was supposed to be in at two! The conductor said so! But he was terribly fat and homely. I might have known."

Trick glanced at her wristwatch. "Ten minutes till five. It usually takes you about one minute to hog-tie them. But Dan's a tough customer."

"He looks tough," Nancy agreed, and

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moved up close to give Dan a broadside of dark blue eyes. "Tough and big—and nice."

"And," Trick added a final warning, "he's been overseas—a war ace. Which means that he's probably had a lot of French mademoiselles work on him, than which, I understand, there are none whicher. So dust off your best wares, Nancy darling."

"She does that," Nancy complained to Dan. "Treats me like a baby. We roomed together at the sorority. That first night when I was pledged—do you remember, Trick? I sniveled, I bawled, I was a homesick little critter. I wanted to go home, you understand, Mr. Moore—no, I'll call you Dan. And she scolded me and petted me and she rushed out and bought me a bottle of lemon soda."

Her fingers caressed his leather flying jacket; her eyes were lifted to his. "Do you like lemon soda, Dan? You *don't* like lemon soda, do you? Neither do I. I detest it! You see, we already have something in common. Your airplane is *cute,* Dan. But you didn't tell me. Do you or don't you like lemon soda?"

"He likes whisky," Block Thatcher stated, in a positive voice. "Now let's get goin'. I'll ride up an' back with you Dan, if it's agreeable. Want to talk to you."

Dan guessed the subject of this talk and had all his arguments prepared by the time they got back to Riverport.

THEY had made a half-circle trip of the mountain. The hour was late and the slanting rays of the sun cast blood-red shafts over the chiseled, white, unearthly beauty of the rearing giant. Even Dan, so accustomed to sights like this, was a little awed by it.

There was a heavy threat of rain in the air and the clouds were low and thick, so that when they got back to Riverport the city lights were on, making a dull glow to the west. Dan cut his engines and Block helped him tail the ship close to the hangar on the north side. Block watched Dan rope the wing-tips down to anchor-eyes, block the wheels fore and aft and fix double slats on rudder, elevator and ailerons, to keep them from being whipped by the wind.

"Expectin' bad weather?" he asked.

"Rain, maybe," Dan agreed. "It's getting late in the season."

"Yep, that's so. How much'd that hangar cost you?"

"Sixty dollars, not counting one man's wages."

"We'd need anyway two of 'em, one at each end," Thatcher said. "Kind we'd want would run nearer five hundred dollars. Dick say anything to you about his airline idea?"

Dan lifted his face, felt the dampness of mist on it. "We'd better go inside the hangar," he proposed. "Mike's got a gas lantern in there some place."

They found the lantern and Dan pumped up pressure and held a match under the generating coil.

"In a way," Thatcher said, "this aviation business may prove a Godsend to Dick. The boy's got my restlessness. He's got plenty of git-up-an'-go to him, but the loggin' game's all cut and dried now. No fun to it anymore, 'less you get fun out of just makin' money. Which I never could understand." He paused but Dan let the silence go on, not helping him.

"Well," Block continued, "here's aviation. It's pioneering, an' Dick's got pioneerin' blood in him." His voice changed to defiance. "Maybe you think my kid ain't got no bottom to him?"

"No," Dan spoke slowly, "I wouldn't say that at all. But I think I know what you're afraid of. If you toss Dick into a tough situation he'll fight like hell to keep his head up. But if he rides along easy it won't be long before he's just another rich loafer."

"Son," Block said with feeling, "you'n me think pretty close together."

There was another silence, each man busy with his own thoughts. Dan knew what was coming, but it had to shape up before he could meet it.

"It'll be a closed corporation," Block

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planned. "Anyway, I can swing this first part. You'll be completely in charge. Absolutely, completely in charge. You'll have a contract to that effect so's you won't be afraid of any monkey business from Dick. Not that the kid's the sort who would butt into things not his business," Thatcher added, with quick loyalty.

"This'll be strictly business," he continued. "You won't get much salary till the thing starts payin'. But you'll get a good big block of stock. If she goes over, you're made. If she don't—well, that's another story. But you mark my words, Moore; the post office department's not going to keep on hauling mail. It'll be private contract. An' we'll be right there to nab one."

DAN picked up a LaRhone tappet rod from the workbench, sighted its length, frowning. He was being given a lot of power here. Power for good or evil. He remembered what Mrs. Thatcher had said. Her husband did trust him; trusted him absolutely.

Trick had once said she would never marry a pilot. He recalled clearly the tone of exasperation she had used in saying it. She wanted a plain, ordinary, stodgy businessman.

He could easily change Dick Thatcher. The boy was the sort who would go off the deep end on flying, if he was given any encouragement. Teach him stunting. Let him experience that supreme intoxication that comes only with the feel of tremendous power and speed at your fingertips. That would be all that was necessary.

"Well," Thatcher said, a tone of annoyance creeping into his voice, "is there something wrong with my proposition?"

Dan put the tappet rod back among the other engine parts. "Yes," he said. "Because airplanes can't fly in bad weather."

Rain drummed lightly on the corrugated tin roof.

"Come out here," Dan invited, leading to the open door of the shed. He pointed. "Can you see anything over there, to the east?"

"Not on a night like this. Of course not."

"Neither can a pilot. And keep this in mind, Block. An airplane is the only human-made machine in existence that must be controlled in three dimensions.

"An automobile you have only to steer to right or left. A bicycle you steer on the horizontal plane and balance on the vertical. But an airplane must be controlled and balanced horizontally, vertically and longitudinally. It's not an easy thing to do when you can see the ground; when you can't see the ground it is impossible."

"Well . . . well, now . . ."

"And there's this: An airplane must be kept going to stay in the air. Regardless of anything else an airspeed of a hundred miles per hour, or some such speed, must be maintained. You can't stop at the side of the road and inquire directions to the next town, or wait till the rain stops."

"Well, hasn't—isn't Red Hoyt flyin' some way with instruments, or something?"

Dan laughed. "Red thinks he is. But a man's sense of balance is a very keen sense, Block. Even though you don't actually look outside, your brain or sense of balance is aware of the brighter light from above and the darker ground below. Just that little bit is enough to steady your senses. But in fog, clouds, heavy rain or heavy snow, you're lost. In no time your senses are reeling."

Block was silent, digesting all this.

Dan lit a cigarette and waited. He wanted these truths to sink in and stay, because he knew that Nagel wouldn't hesitate a moment in taking advantage of the old man and his wealth.

"So you couldn't fly in the winter," Block said, more to himself than to Dan. "That is, you couldn't figure on much flyin'. So that leaves you maybe four months of operation outa the year."

"That's right," Dan agreed. "And there's another thing. People ride in airplanes for their speed; in emergencies. They use airmail for the same reason. Well, you've heard how, in the winter, a letter sent by train always beats one sent by plane.

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That's such a well established truth that it's gotten to be a joke."

Old Thatcher considered these things for a long time, his face slack with disappointment. Then he shrugged the whole thing away in disgust. "Let's go get us a drink of cougar sweat, son. An' tomorrow you'n me's goin'ta drive over to the coast where maybe I'll need your help with a gent who can't tell his timber from mine, sometimes."

Dan nodded, relieved. He twirled the gas valve shut on the lantern. "Lead on, Block. The way I feel, a good fight would come in handy right now."

And he meant it.

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The Light in the Window

An Argosy Oddity

By JIM KJELGAARD

Author of "The Captains Pass", "Water Runs Down Hill", etc.

ONE hollow-cheeked man sat on the bunk. Another, who'd been slumped on a chair, got up and peered listlessly through the window. Eight feet of snow lay about the cabin. Outside, the surly waters of Caribou Lake showed black in the gathering night.

The snow had fallen three weeks ago, in one day and two nights. It had not been warm enough to melt the snow, or cold enough to freeze the lake.

Joe Batts returned to his chair.

"It's a gettin' dark," he announced in a weary, flat voice as if the fact of alternate daylight and darkness was of no portent whatever. "It's a gettin' colder too."

On the bunk Darb Morris stirred. His eyes were a network of tiny red veins, and had more an animal than a human expression.

"What of it?" he snarled.

"Nothin'. Nothin'," Batts said hastily, as if to placate. " 'Cept I was thinkin' that it's past eatin' time an' Ray ain't here yet. I was thinkin' that we might's well eat."

"Might's well."

Morris got off the bunk with alacrity, and walked to the cabinet where they kept their rapidly diminishing store of grub. Batts lit a tallow candle and placed it on the window sill. He stepped back, viewing his work with evident satisfaction.

"There!" he said. "That'll pull him home, given he gets back to where he can see it."

DARB MORRIS ignored him. With a knife he cut six strips of bacon, one as nearly exactly like the other as he could guage them, and laid four of them in a skillet. The other two were placed in a dish on the table. He cut six slices of bread, no two slices varying from each other by more than a fraction of an ounce, and put two of them with the two strips of bacon.

That would be their supper. Caught without snowshoes by the unseasonably early snow, they were marooned here. The third man, Ray, had spent his time since the snow had fallen splitting birch slabs with an ax and fashioning a crude pair

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of snowshoe frames that he had laced over with strips cut from a skin jacket.

He had started out early this morning in the hope of finding a trapper's shack along the lake. But the other two were acquainted in the country, where they had come to prospect. There were no trappers on the lake.

Morris put the skillet on the stove. The bacon began to sizzle. Batts sat as close to the stove as he could get, sniffing hungrily. The bacon was lifted with a fork—carefully to spill no precious drop of hot grease on the stove—and turned. Then it was taken from the skillet and two strips were placed on each of two plates.

The four slices of bread were laid in the skillet, and cooked on both sides. Two slices were laid on each plate, and the pan was painstakingly scraped with a spoon.

The men ate hungrily, but not rapidly. They broke little pieces of bread off the slices, put tiny bits of bacon on them, and chewed it as long as they could.

When the food was all gone, each man licked his plate until it shone. They sat with arms folded on the table, staring at each other and listening to the wind.

Joe Batts said, "Gee, I'd hate to be Ray out in that!"

Morris stared at the plate between them, that still had two slices of bacon and two pieces of bread on it. His tongue stole out and went back. He glanced covertly at his companion, and his gaze was even more that of an animal.

"LOOK," he said suddenly. "Let's not make no bones about this. We got enough grub to keep three of us alive three weeks."

Batts glanced at him greedy and afraid.

"I don't get you," he whined.

"Three weeks' grub for three is four weeks' grub for two."

"But there's Ray—"

"Damn Ray! I told him before he started out that there wasn't no trappers up here. There's nobody up here, and after the lake freezes nobody will be able to get here in time to do us any good at all.

"I told him that, but—'There's always a chance, boys. I won't give up while there is a chance. Be sure to leave a candle in the window so I can get back.' Him and his hymn singin'! He made his own bed. Now let him lie in it!"

Joe Batts shivered, but he was visibly weakening. "I don't know," he said. "It's like killin' him. That—"

"Bosh! It ain't a question of that. It's our lives or his, ain't it? He can't follow his snowshoe tracks back here because the wind will have blowed them in by now. He's got to depend on followin' the lake line until he sees the candle showin' through the window because he don't know the country. Even if he did, it wouldn't do him no good at night.

"Besides, the chances is ten to one he won't even get back this far. Them snowshoes he made ain't goin' to last long. Snuff the candle out. We'll eat his grub now to clinch it. I could stand more."

"Me too. But—"

"Snuff the candle out!"

A HALF hour later, out on the lake, Ray turned to the lean helmeted man who, flying south from the Arctic, had that morning landed his plane on Caribou Lake to make temporary repairs. They were in the collapsable boat that the flyer had carried in his plane.

"But they must be here!" Ray said desperately. "I can't understand it. You can see the window from the lake."

The flyer shook his head.

"Sorry, old boy. But the rate this lake's freezing, it'll be ice by morning. We've been clear around it. We can start a relief party off the minute we land. If we don't get off tonight, we'll be marooned here too."

Having been born in the North, he knew only too well that a dark window that should have been a light one meant that those who should have made the light were no longer able to. Or else—

But if they'd done that, they needn't be pitied anyway.

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"Steady, Mary, steady," said old Dr. Gillespie. "Her man is dead—killed!"

Dr. Kildare's Crisis

By MAX BRAND

THESE are the people who are leaning on young DR. JIMMY KILDARE—for hope, for encouragement, for life itself:

MARY LAMONT, Jimmy's fiancée and assisting nurse, who is in an agony of fear over some hereditary trait that she suspects is cropping up in her brother

DOUGLAS LAMONT, an economist fired with a project to save the world by moving the poor from slums to farms. He is furious when Kildare, troubled by his symptoms, keeps him from a meeting with PAUL MESSENGER and P. J. WILLOUGHBY, the men who could help in putting his project into action. But Kildare's tentative diagnosis is confirmed by

DR. GILLESPIE, the great diagnostic genius who is teaching Jimmy everything he can before he—Gillespie—dies of cancer. To increase Jimmy's burden, there's

JOE WEYMAN, an ambulance driver devoted to the young doc, who has gone stale on his job and taken heavily to liquor. In the hope of saving him, Kildare pleads with

SALLY, the switchboard girl in the hospital. Knowing that she loves Weyman, Kildare urges her to marry him and get him away from his job.

The first installment of this four-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for December 21

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BUT Jimmy's chief concern is Douglas Lamont. In spite of the man's resentment and distrust, Jimmy visits him and explains the nature of his disease.

Lamont laughs; but Kildare is deadly serious. He offers to prove his diagnosis if only Lamont will have dinner with him—eating steak; and Lamont agrees. He has a seizure, and is terrified.

Now Kildare talks to him earnestly—assuring him of belief in him and in his project, but counseling a life of complete rest and withdrawal from the world. "No stump speeches," he says. "Put your message into a book."

For the disease he has found in Mary Lamont's brother is—epilepsy. . . .

CHAPTER XV

THIS IS MY BROTHER

TWICE the next day, Kildare got off for brief visits to Douglas Lamont. He was able to say to Mary: "He's resting easily. But I wouldn't call on him. Not just now. He's perfectly tranquil and he's all clear about you, Mary. He's dropped all his wild ideas about treachery."

"Even *I* would be too much for him?" she said.

"You know how it is," said Kildare. "A man comes to the end of his tether and doesn't realize how gone he is until he starts relaxing. Then the weakness comes over him—in a wave."

"And the second meeting with Mr. Messenger? That has to go by the board, too?"

"There'll be plenty of other chances for that," he told her.

"It only makes me wonder," she said. "When I think what a tiger he was, Jimmy! I just wonder that he can be patient now!"

He looked away from her, remembering the empty, dead eyes that had looked up from the bed at him, this day. Well, "patience" was one word for it, though despair might have been a better one. And it was not altogether a lie to say that Douglas was "resting easily."

He went on, cheerfully: "It was simply a matter of being frank with him, and pointing out that he must give up the powerhouse tactics that he's been pursuing. The idea of a battleship's engine put in a ferry boat—that seemed to make it clear to him that his power was shaking him to pieces. You see? Too much vibration for the size of the boat. He grew entirely sensible."

He winced just a trifle when he said this, recalling how Douglas Lamont had shrunk as the bludgeoning of medical common sense was given to him. Kildare could not tell that the accurate eye of Mary Lamont had registered the pain with which he spoke.

"The main thing now," said Kildare, "is for him to be quiet and watch his diet. No meat for a while. Light, simple things, and all that. But he'll build up fast, I hope."

"And the drinking?" she asked.

She had a way of standing close to him, looking up to study his face. She was doing it now, with a religious intensity.

"Of course, the drinking was bad. Not that he did much of it. No moral danger, as they say. But he thought it was a crutch that he could lean on, you know."

He went off, turning after a few steps to smile at her.

That struck her harder than anything else. It was not his way to consider her very much, except in emergencies. The rest of the time he went his own way with his head down, like a bulldog. The pause, the turning, the smile seemed to her typical of the Jimmy Kildare who, in a pinch, could be so filled with tenderness. There *was* a crisis, then, after all.

THE beat of her heart was hurried. The old breathlessness returned on her. With every step she made down the hospital corridor there increased in her mind the certainty that Kildare had hidden something important about her brother.

Young Dr. Bixby came up from behind her with a rapid stride.

"Hai!" he said, going by.

"Hai—wait a minute!" she called after him.

He slowed up as she joined him.

"I want an answer to a riddle," she said.

"Medical?"

"Yes. Lots of phenobarbital and no meat—that sort of thing?"

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"Phenobarbital—and low protein . . . Why, that sounds like something serious. Let's see," said Bixby. "Ah, I remember now. It sounds like—that's it—epilepsy! That's what it's apt to be."

"Ah! Thanks a lot," she said.

He went on, for her feet had slowed to a totter and then to a complete halt. She put her hand against the wall and remembered to breathe deeply. It seemed to her that beyond the wall, in every room, there were housed secrets hostile to her.

It was the end of her day, at any rate, and she could give thanks for that. It enabled her to go to her room, and Molly Cavendish, the head nurse, walked up the stairs with her with a man's large, capable stride that made her skirts swish noisily.

"So you're dying by inches, still?" said Molly Cavendish. "Now, there's something I thank God for, and that's the fact that I've left damned nonsense twenty-five years behind me. I used to die, too. But after a while you find out that there's nothing worth dying for. Is it any better to be the way I am? I don't know. *You* think that the yellow stuff is all gold; and I know that it's only gilding. It's better to be a happy fool that a sad old woman, maybe. But when I see the white in your face, darling, I can't tell whether I want to spank you or love you."

At the door of Mary's room she paused and said: "It's that young Kildare, of course?"

"No. Not really. Not at all," said Mary.

"But you're admitting that there's only a sick, sick heart in you? And there's no place to turn?"

"No."

"And even if you could have the whole world, would you want it?"

"No," said Mary.

"Well, then there's Kildare in it somewhere," said Molly Cavendish, "and I've half a mind to find him and tell him a few home truths."

"No, please, please!"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"You won't do it? You won't say a word?"

"All right," said Molly Cavendish, "but let me tell you something: there's damned few things in the world that straight talk won't make come all right in the end."

She went off down the hall with her heavy footfall. Mary, alone in the waiting stillness of her small room, knew that she could not endure it for a single hour. She bathed, changed, and went out into the twilight bound for her brother's hotel.

IT WAS dark when she reached it. The door was strangely ajar when she knocked at it. A maid with towels over her arm came to open for her.

"The gentleman's out," said she.

Mary looked past her to a service tray on the table. What held her eyes was the remnant of a steak: a chunk of fat and gristle with some shred of meat adhering. It was an ugly thing to look at, a small, ugly thing; and it had ten added meanings to her since Bixby had suggested something.

According to Kildare, Douglas was stretched on his bed, resting, relaxed, preparing himself for only small exertions. According to Kildare, Douglas had given up his appointment for this evening with Messenger for a second time. According to facts, Douglas was not in his room at all!

It was not epilepsy, of course. That dreadful sickness of her heart was foolish. It was not epilepsy. A man who knows he has a thing like that obeys doctor's orders as she would obey an angel from heaven. And here was Douglas out on the city.

At the drugstore she telephoned to the Messenger house, saying: "This is Dr. Kildare's office calling. Is Mr. Douglas Lamont expected there this evening?"

"Mr. Lamont has been here for an hour already," said the butler. "The gentlemen have been here for at least an hour. Any message from the doctor?"

"No message," she said.

She was smiling as she reached the pavement again and there were tears of happiness in her eyes. After all, she must learn to take her suspicions less seriously, she told herself. She had been trying to read

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things into Kildare's face and voice, and his parting smile.

As a matter of fact, what she had learned from Bixby was the mere happen-chance that seems to fit in with facts, now and then. But, really, Douglas was exactly as Kildare had represented him—spent, exhausted. And a day's rest in bed had done so much for him that he had felt entirely equal to going to Messenger's house and arguing his points with the experts.

She walked on, too happy to know where she was going except that she was moving crosstown, toward one of the brilliantly lighted avenues.

There was only one point that she could not reason out and explain. That non-protein diet was what stopped her. For she could not help remembering the steak that had made a dinner for Douglas.

Suppose that it *were* that horrible name—epilepsy—that concerned her brother? She tried to remember what she could of the disease. Usually it was accompanied by mental decay, longer and more severe spastic fits, and could lead to death; certainly led to a tortured and abbreviated life.

But there were rare cases. Medicine knew very little about them because they rarely came to hospitals or asked for treatment. They were the men and the women in whom epilepsy appeared as a sudden enormous brightening of the flame, interspersed with periods of excessive dullness.

She remembered learning about Danton, great and terrible as a conflagration even among the wild figures of the French Revolution. He had loomed in Paris time and again to make tremendous pronouncements that changed the fate of the world.

And then he would disappear out to a quiet little country house. There nothing could move him, not even threats of personal danger. And finally he would appear again, always briefly, always a dazzling light.

When the Allies poured toward Paris, it was Danton who taught France how to meet them and cried for *"de l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace!"* But hardly a moment later, and he was gone back to the green peace and quiet of his countryside. Was not the terrible Danton an epileptic of that singular variety, like a variable star that now is brilliant, now dim?

And there were others, whose flame came and went more swiftly. There were Caesar, Mahomet. Perhaps that most eloquent of Englishmen, that empire-builder, Chatham, was afflicted by epilepsy when, during his second administration, he sat in his country estate unable to meet even his dearest friends, unable to lift a hand in the crises of his country's affairs.

THESE things came to her dimly, and others more clearly out of the past, but they were more hearsay than fact. What troubled her was the realization that Douglas had varied between a penetrating eagerness of mind and a sluggish dullness.

And if diet controlled the disease—if indeed he *were* epileptic and the diet controlled it—might he not have induced the aura by ordering the very food which Kildare had forbidden him?

The terror caught her by the throat. She walked on more rapidly, realizing that all the while she had been bent on reaching the house of Paul Messenger in her subconscious mind. She saw it now looming in the next block, and the sight of it reassured her subtly and completely.

She walked down the block in front of it, paused a moment at the corner and turned back again. She was nearly in front of it when the front door of the house opened and Douglas Lamont stood at the head of the steps.

The brilliant hall-lights streamed out around him. He was not alone. Paul Messenger himself was in the open doorway, and three other men surrounded Douglas. But he was the dominant figure, though he was smaller than any of the others. He stood out from them like a Napoleon surrounded by marshals. They were inclining their heads toward him, watching him, listening to his words.

She could hear him say: "Ah, Wil-

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loughby, you're the one I was particularly afraid of."

And a tall, leaning, studious figure bowed toward Douglas, saying: "The fact is that your idea has a double value, Lamont. In the first place, it is what every man in the world wants to believe in; in the second place you're poet enough to make every man think that it can be done; and economist enough to spike the guns of the enemy, as you've spiked ours tonight."

They came on down the steps. Douglas had turned to say goodnight again to big Paul Messenger, who stood above them, radiant. Now he was passing down along with the others, and they attended him, it seemed to her happy, tear-filled eyes, like lesser creatures around one divinely chosen.

This was his great moment and he had made the best of it. Perhaps he would fit into one of those highest niches which are reserved in the history of mankind for the great geniuses, the great benefactors.

He stood on the lowest step, now, and suddenly seemed to grow higher. She saw the men on his right and left catch him by the arms. He had stiffened, his head thrown far back, his arms thrusting out into crooked, stiff, rigid positions, like the arms of a statue awkwardly poised. She could see the distention of the cords in his throat. A voice that seemed to come from the mouth of a beast groaned aloud. And then he fell.

CHAPTER XVI

FAREWELL TO LOVE

THEY caught at him. They prevented him from striking the sidewalk but before they could lift him again, she had her arms around him.

It was like embracing a figure of wood. Paul Messenger was running down the steps. She stood up. She heard her voice saying, calmly: "Call for Dr. Kildare at the Blair General Hospital, and carry him back into the house."

They obeyed her. They did not exclaim, these men of mind, but each gave his attention studiously to the working hand. Somehow Paul Messenger managed to take the whole weight into his arms. He carried the trembling body back into his house.

There was his daughter, Nancy, coming hurrying. She had a quick smile of recognition for Mary Lamont. And then Mary's voice was giving directions again—to prepare a hot bath and get him into it, and above all to get Dr. Kildare, quickly, quickly!

They carried Douglas up the stairs. As they went, she could hear the voice of Nancy crying at a telephone: "Jimmy, this is Nancy. . . . Jimmy dear, come quickly—jump as fast as you can! Douglas Lamont has collapsed. . . . Yes, yes, he's here at Father's house. . . . It seems to be a fit of some sort. . . ."

SHE followed the body of Douglas, frozen as if by death. And was it not in fact a death that had occurred? All that happened around her became fixed, static, as if a slow moving picture projected the images upon the screen of her mind.

She never could forget the silly Gainsborough, golden and blue and foolish, that hung in the upper hall, or, in a niche hollowed in the wall, a Greek head remodeled by some patient Roman copyist. Twenty centuries had turned the marble to pale gold, but the statue had been hardly used. The nose was half chipped away, the back of the head was gone, and great excoriations ran up one side of the face. Half her smile had disappeared, and yet the smile was there, and the grace, and the girlish sweetness which somehow shone more clearly through the torment and the disfigurement and the long, long rain of years. It seemed to Mary Lamont an exquisite distillation of her own agony, a sort of fellow sorrow which she could take to her heart.

Down the upper hall the deep nap of the carpet muffled all footfalls to whisperings. In this hush she followed Douglas to a grave. Perhaps he would not die; but it was death for her, death for the children that should be born to her, death to all the years of her life that were to have been spent with Kildare.

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Two times the blow had fallen in one family, and that was enough. Her uncle had died in an institution; and now her own brother was tainted in the brain. The whiz of the arrow had gone just past her cheek. When she had reached the same age —who could tell what she would be?

And there was Kildare to be wounded by the same stroke. *He* would not shrink back from such a danger to their life together, but he would have no children, of course. He never would speak a reproach; he never would permit himself even inwardly to regret. That was the stuff he was made of, that champion of lost causes.

Time went vaguely past her. Her hands were occupied, now. Her voice giving directions. All the other people were gone except the great and terrible Willoughby, he of the baby face and the gigantic brow; and there was stalwart Paul Messenger, and lovely Nancy.

What had been done could hardly be wrong; and now they had Douglas in a bed where the fresh attacks of the convulsion stretched him again and again, as if on a rack. Froth kept coming to his lips, a blood-stained froth. His eyes, partially open, and his hard-drawn mouth, seemed to express resistance to the torment. He was like a picture of one about to scream.

"It's going to be all right," said Nancy.

FOR an instant full consciousness rushed back on Mary and she looked into the eyes of the other girl, and saw her moving in deep space and time, surrounded by wealth and love and children and happiness so still and perfect that it would be like quiet music.

"All right, did you say?" asked Mary, and she saw Nancy shrink. There was a perfect comprehension in this girl, at least.

She said: "Jimmy will make everything right, Mary. Jimmy always makes everything right. You know how he is and what he can do."

"Yes. I know," said Mary. "This time he has a perfect chance to throw his *own* life away. It's what he's made for, isn't it? You couldn't know him; you couldn't look at him, without understanding that he'd have no luck in the end."

Her voice surprised her own ears, it was so curiously level and easily modulated, as if she were a teacher pointing out a medical instance in a classroom, or a lecturer illustrating a point of character in someone long dead. She saw the head of Nancy bow.

Afterward, Nancy said something to her father; and from that point forward the eye of Messenger dwelt on her from time to time with a profound, gloomy understanding and sympathy. *They* knew that she had accepted the emptiness of the future, and they knew that there was no other honorable thing for her to do.

She had to leave Jimmy. She had to drive him away in such a fashion that he never would come near her again. In some way, she would manage to work out a scheme that would appear sound. There was Douglas to take care of. That was to be her life work.

That was to be everything.

She saw it all clearly. It would be a life in miniature. Bitterness by degrees would pinch her mouth and harden her eyes.

Kildare suddenly was in the room. Nancy Messenger was kissing him. If only Nancy would keep the tears out of her eyes! For there must be no tears now. All was to be calm, stone-calm and steady forever. She could thank God that Kildare himself was as undemonstrative as a rock.

He was a little pale; but then his color rarely was good. The darkness of continual exhaustion always was thumbed in around his eyes. But he was steady; he was like a rock. There never was a tremor of his hands.

He was opening his medical kit while he was on his way across the room. A moment later he was breaking the ampule of phenobarbital. He took the whole of it into his hypodermic; three whole grains he gave to Douglas in the arm. Then he sat down to watch.

SHE became aware of time and events once more. It was a classical condition of epilepsy, the true status epilepticus that

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kills through exhaustion unless the patient is brought out before many hours.

She began to use a towel to wipe away the sweat from the face and throat of Douglas, and to clear his mouth of the blood-stained froth. Kildare, hooking a stethoscope around his neck, listened from time to time to the heart: to the ventricles, to the auricles, and then back to the big laboring ventricles. Now he took the pulse to see how the beats were coming through.

It was as impossible to read his mind as if he had been a statue. She began to massage, softly, the neck cords, and looked to Kildare for permission. He nodded.

She did not exist for him, she knew, except as a machine. He was suspended in space. There was no room around him, no people. There was only his patient. She had seen him, so many times before, in exactly this state of suspension, pouring all his mind, all his energy into a patient; as if from some store of electrical energy he were able to give back the vital strength to the sick.

There was one peculiarity about him: he nearly always had a finger on the pulse, or resting lightly on the arm of the patient, as if instinctively he needed that physical contact and received through it those impalpable impressions, those swift, dim messages which come only to a very great doctor.

Some people, when they talked about him in the hospital—and they always were talking about the rising of this bright, new star—declared that his skin was too thin. He could not continue giving his own vitality to every patient that came into his hands. But she knew they were wrong. The more he gave, the more there was to be given.

Douglas began to roll his eyes. They turned wildly to the right, then to the left. Then back they turned, the lids wide open, the eyeball distended, with the little red arteries coming into visibility.

When sense goes out of the eyes, a man seems to become a mere beast. And so it was with Dougles. He was not her brother. He was merely a sufferer for whom, with the passage of every moment, her hope grew less and less.

It was midnight, suddenly. For hours he had been lying there receiving shock after shock of the convulsions. Usually epileptics turned rigid with the fit, then relaxed; and the convulsion might come again later, when nature had restored some strength to the body. But this was one long, long tension which, in the end, must snap the thread of life.

It was wonderful that Douglas had endured as long as this. It seemed clear to her that without the touch of Kildare upon him he would have died long hours ago. And love for the young doctor burst upward, suddenly, from her heart. It pressed like an exploding force against her teeth. She set them harder.

The wild impulse receded, died away. She was vastly grateful that the all-seeing eye of Kildare had not fallen upon her at that moment. It never would happen again. It never would come to her again. At the source, in the heart itself, she would learn how to control and kill every one of these tremendous outgoings.

Time takes care of such matters. There would come a day when she would be able to talk, calmly, of the time when she had been a hospital nurse. She could hear herself telling some faintly interested companion how she had seen genius come to the Blair General Hospital, and how he had been looked on askance, and how he had persisted in his bulldog ways, making his own independent diagnoses, clinging to them in spite of the devil and all authority, again and again on the verge of expulsion, again and again re-accepted, until at last the strange news was abroad in the whole great institution that a genius, a creature of compacted and brilliant light, was among them.

By that time he would be "the celebrated Doctor Kildare," "The greatest diagnostician since the death of famous Doctor Gillespie." News reporters are learning how to write about scientists of genius. They would learn to write about Kildare in the same manner. He would be up there for the

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world to admire; and all the while he would carry on with that strange humility which she knew so well, that selfless purpose which he had been born to and which he inherited again from the great Gillespie.

He, at least, would never forget her. There was no forgetfulness in that brain of his.

NOW she heard Messenger saying: "Mr. Willoughby, don't you think you had better go and get some rest?"

She glanced quickly around the room. It was two in the morning. Nancy still was there, fetching and carrying when anything was needed. Paul Messenger was there. So was the baby face, the huge, smooth forehead of the famous Willoughby.

She heard Willoughby answering: "May I ask the doctor a question?"

"Certainly, Mr. Willoughby."

"Doctor, is not your patient in considerable danger?" asked Willoughby.

"He is in danger," said Kildare, without visible emotion.

"In that case," said Willoughby, "if it is permitted, I should like to remain with my colleague." He added, rather dreamily: "We have not his like in the world, you know. Doctor, may I ask you what hopes there may be, and to what the seizure may be attributed?"

Kildare did not turn his head. He seemed to be speaking to the unconscious man on the bed as he said: "This man could have kept a reasonable degree of health and safety if he had been willing to live quietly; if he had been willing to move the mountain a grain of sand at a time. But he was afraid that his idea would die unless he fought for it now. He knew that he was risking his life. He chose to risk it."

Willoughby stood up from his chair. He seemed about to speak, then changed his mind and sank into the chair slowly again.

Messenger said in a moved voice: "I hope that his work does not have to fail without him, Mr. Willoughby?"

There was a moment of silence then, and Messenger seemed almost frightened.

"Perhaps not," said Willoughby. "But he is the torch that set us on fire. We are cold souls. Can we pass along the fire that was in him? Can we make people venture their money, their souls?"

"We can try," said Messenger.

"We can," answered Willoughby, "and we shall!"

Kildare, his finger on the pulse having discovered something, put the stethoscope suddenly over the heart of Douglas. He listened intently.

She thought: *"God have mercy!"*

Kildare glanced quickly up at her, and she knew that she had uttered her thought aloud. Kildare said, in that calm, familiar voice, which always was deepened and enriched by the great crisis: "There is still a good chance. There is a spinal puncture to relieve the intracranial pressure."

Her cold hands assisted in turning Douglas, in baring his back, in sterilizing a place for the needle. She saw the liquid drawn off in the syringe. The back was covered, the body turned again. And Kildare once more listened with the stethoscope, intently.

After a moment he glanced up at her from out of that hidden world whose mysteries he knew so well. He looked at her and one of his rare smiles came and went.

A groaning breath of relief passed her lips. This was the reprieve for which she had stopped hoping. And almost at once the tension commenced to relax in the cords of the throat. The breathing of Douglas grew stertorous, then more normal. The wooden rigidity passed from his body. His eyes closed, then opened suddenly with clear consciousness in them again, at last.

His voice said, faintly but very clearly: "For the sake of the poor, for the sake of the handless, helpless poor, for the sake of the inert and prostrate minds, gentlemen, let us make the great attempt and trust in God. Let us . . ."

The voice trailed away. He slept.

"We shall," said Willoughby's hushed voice. "We shall trust in God!"

SOMEONE was sobbing very quietly. That was Nancy. And then, by a miracle, Mary found that she was alone in

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the room with Kildare and the sleeping man.

It was much later. The dawn was beginning to finger the big windows. And she had returned from a long, sad trek of the imagination across weary continents of thoughts.

Kildare stood up and she rose also, instinctively. He was very tired. His lips fumbled the words as he said: "He can lead a life that will have to be very quiet at first. But he can increase his activity by degrees. I've written out the diet and the prescription for the medicine. He can be moved from here later on today, or perhaps early tomorrow. Telephone to me if there is any bad change. I think that's all."

She saw that the time had come to strike the blow. She could sever the mooring line and cast herself adrift from him forever. Kind explanations never would do, with him. He simply would insist. He would beat down resistance, finally with ease. It was with a sharp edge that she must deal with him, and nothing else.

"You've been very kind and efficient," she said.

He glanced sharply at her, frowning, bewildered by her tone.

"But let's be frank. Isn't that the best way? Of course I know that you could have prevented all this, if you'd chosen to."

"Prevented—if I'd chosen?" he echoed, helplessly.

She opened the door for him.

"Instead of that, you've let his life become a ruin. And what are you or a thousand like you compared with one mind like his?"

He walked past her into the hall.

"You're tired and a little wild, Mary," he said. "I'll talk to you later on."

Without a reply, she closed the door on him, heavily. And, having closed it, her body leaned against it, her face in the hollow of her arm as she sobbed. If he came back now, he would understand everything at a glance. But he did not come back. She prayed that the doorknob would turn, but it remained inert under her hand.

CHAPTER XVII

TELL SALLY

KILDARE, back at the hospital, still shaking his head to clear it of the strange nightmare impression which Mary had left in him, passed a softly singing voice at the telephone board.

"Good morning, Dr. Kildare!" called Sally. She glanced around her to make sure that there was no one within hearing distance. "How is everything, doc?"

"Everything's all right," said Kildare. "And how about Joe?"

"This is his last day on the ambulance," she said. "Oh, I've made him swear higher than a stack of Bibles. Get the promises when you can. That's my idea. We're gunna be so happy. The big mug! We're gunna be so happy! Thanks to you, doc!"

He went up to bed, set his alarm clock, and fell heavily asleep. It seemed hardly five minutes before the speaker was saying: "Dr. Kildare, wanted in Dr. Gillespie's office. . . . Dr. Kildare wanted in Dr. Gillespie's office."

He stumbled into his white clothes and went down to the waiting line. He carried with him a vague sense of disastrous defeat; it was only later that he remembered the words of Mary, but they were too strange for credence.

The first shock came when he rang the nursing home and found that Mary Lamont had resigned her position.

The second blow was when Molly Cavendish, that afternoon, stopped in his office to say: "So you let her go, did you? You kept at her until her heart was gone out of her, and then you let her slip away?"

Her face was grim.

"But she's not away," said Kildare. "The fact is . . ."

"Argue with your grandmother, not with me," said Molly Cavendish, and slammed out of the room.

He rang Paul Messenger's house then.

She was not there. She had called in an outside doctor who gave permission to move Douglas, who was greatly recovered after his sleep. An ambulance had called. The

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Messengers did not know the address to which she had taken her brother.

After that, Kildare was a serious man. Hardly an hour later a special delivery was brought to him, a little packet containing a brief note from Mary Lamont. It read:

Dear Jimmy,—

The fact is that we'd never be able to forget what has happened to Douglas. You'd never forget and I'd never forgive. So let's agree to stop trying. We've never done a very good job of life, even in the planning of it. So what chance would there have been in tackling the reality together?

I'm sending back your letters. All three of them. Certainly you weren't inspired to any great eloquence by this girl, were you? And certainly you didn't try the old pen and ink very often.

Well Jimmy, old dear, I'll try to think kinder thoughts before long and wish you everything in your work.

Affectionately,

Mary

HE READ it over two or three times. There was no Mary in it. He couldn't recognize a single phrase. But perhaps women are like that: more fierce and relentless than men, when their minds are made up.

He rang Lamont's hotel. As he expected, he was no longer registered there; his luggage had been removed by Miss Lamont. Suddenly he realized that he lacked even a trace of her. She had melted out of his sight completely.

Gillespie was sure to find out before long. It was no surprise to Kildare when, late in the afternoon, Gillespie said: "What's this about Mary Lamont giving up her job? To take care of her brother?"

"So it seems," said Kildare.

"Seems? Don't you know?"

"No, sir."

"Wait a minute. Where is the girl?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You what?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Gillespie. "You mean that you're wrecked on this business of the brother?"

Kildare said nothing. For suddenly it seemed to him that there was no breath left in him for speech.

"You mean," went on Gillespie, "that you'll let her fade out of your life without making a single effort?"

"If I could find her . . ." said Kildare. "But New York's a big place."

"Bah!" said Gillespie. "If you gave a single damn about her, you'd track her down in five minutes."

But the stream of the hospital work did not slacken, and Kildare was surprised to find himself seeing as clearly, thinking as swiftly as ever. Within him there was the persistent ache of his heart, but he was accustomed to that sort of pain. He had grown up familiar with it, when he was fighting his way through school.

Gillespie called in the ambulance driver, Joe Weyman.

He said: "Weyman, you've got an eye in your head. Start using it. Mary Lamont has disappeared. Kildare can't find her. Your friend Mike Ryan knows the police. Ask him what to do. And get out in your infernal ambulance and start cruising like a taxicab. You might find out something. You know the sort of hotels she'd stop at, the sort of restaurants she'd eat in."

"She left? *She* left the doc?" breathed Weyman.

Gillespie scowled.

"I've given you the facts. Go out and do something about them. I'll cover you on the use of the ambulance. Get going, Weyman!"

So Weyman got going, hurrying like a frightened animal to Mike Ryan, first of all.

MIKE RYAN leaned his elbows on the edge of the bar and shook his head. "It ain't likely to of happened," said Mike. "I've seen her and I've heard her talk. It ain't the sort of a thing she'd do."

"Yeah, but you never can tell with a gal that's had education mixed up in her head," said Weyman.

"That's true," agreed Ryan. "You get a female that thinks she can think, and all hell is likely to pay for it. They get proud of their ideas. You can't never tell any

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man or any woman, either, when they start thinking their way out."

"Get the cops on the job," said Weyman. "I'm gonna go cruising."

So he went cruising, hour by hour, while the day clouded over and the soft, slow rain began to fall. At fifty places he made his inquiries; but the day had ended and the twilight begun before he saw Mary Lamont beside a street lamp, seeing to the loading of luggage into a taxicab. By the time he had pulled in beside the curb, the girl was gone back into the little hotel.

"Hai, taxi," said Weyman, "where does *that* load go?"

"It's catching a boat for South America at seven o'clock," said the taxi. "Why?"

"What pier?" asked Weyman.

"Forty-three, I think," said the taxi-driver. "What's the idea, brother?"

Weyman, for answer, dropped his gear shift lever into first and made the engine howl as he shot the ambulance down the street. He had no time to spare. There would be a saving if he simply stopped and telephoned the news to the doc; but a telephone call was a dull way of doing something that could be made so dramatic.

He foretasted his hurried entry, his breathless rush into Kildare's office. Therefore, although the time was short to get to the hospital and leave the warning, he stepped on the gas and prepared his speech.

He was grinning so that he hardly saw the ten-year-old urchin that jumped out from the curb, laughing, his head turned to watch the running boy behind him. He was hardly ten feet away before Weyman snapped out of his day-dream and swerved the heavy ambulance.

The boy, screeching, jumped aside and missed death by a scant fraction; and on that street oiled by the rain the ambulance squirted sideways, out of control, like a wet watermelon seed shot out from between thumb and forefinger.

Weyman, desperately trying to right it, saw the rear of a great twenty-ton trailer-truck loom through the rain mist. The red of the rear-end lights streaked across his brain; then the crash blotted out the world.

WHEN Joe Weyman came to, he felt nothing but a numbness. A policeman was kneeling beside him.

Some one said: "They oughta shoot him; they oughta put him out of his misery. God, I never seen nothing like it!"

Weyman bent his head and saw that they were speaking of him. His body was like a hillside after a spring rain. Blood gushed from twenty small fountains. He tried to lift his hand and brush away some blood that was tickling his upper lip. But he could not move his hand. His legs were spread-eagled in a queer way that made no sense. They were not two legs. They were a jumble.

A siren came toward them, screaming.

"Take it easy, bucko," said the policeman. "There'll be a doctor here in a minute and slide a shot into you, and then you'll be all right. You won't feel nothing."

"Wait a minute," said Weyman. "I gotta think. There was something that I had to do. I had to do something for the doc . . ."

"Leave the doc wait," said the cop. "Think about yourself, brother, for a while."

"Listen, guy — officer, I mean — I'm cooked. I'm passing out. I can't only half see you. For God's sake have a heart and do what I ask. Will you?"

"I'll do it."

"Get out your book."

"I've got it out."

"Write down—telephone board, Blair General Hospital, gal named Sally."

"I've got it."

"Never mind. Leave that till later. There's a doctor in that hospital . . . Kildare."

"Okay."

"Grab a taxi and beat it for the hospital. Get to him. If you have to break down doors, get to him."

"I'll get to him, all right," said the officer.

"Tell him that Mary Lamont — L-A-M-O-N-T — leaving for South America. Pier . . ."

Darkness lifted suddenly above his lips,

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above his eyes. He heard a voice calling faintly to him: "What pier, buddy?"

"Pier Forty-three. Seven o'clock. Tell Sally . . ."

CHAPTER XVIII

I'D HAVE A PRAYER

THEY brought Tim Creegan into the operating room at Blair General; and he was in a panic. The nurses were contemptuous.

"If you'd give me only half a second to see the doc," whined Creegan.

"Hold up a minute," said Bixby. "What doc? Dr. Kildare?"

"Yeah, the doc," said Creegan.

"I'll try to get him for you," said Bixby. "But he's a busy man, Creegan."

"Yeah, but if I could just lay an eye on him for a minute, and hear him tell me it'll be all right."

So Kildare came, hurrying.

"Simple appendectomy," said Bixby. "No signs of any complications. All clear sailing."

"Doc," said Creegan, "is it true? Is it all right?"

"It's all right," said Kildare.

"Are they gunna put me out, first? Are they gunna choke off my wind?"

"Did you give Creegan a good shot before you brought him in here?"

"I did," said Bixby, "but he's terribly nervous. It didn't seem to take the edge off him at all."

"Doc, stand by a minute, will you?" begged Creegan. "I can't breathe good."

He struggled to sit upright.

"Steady," said Kildare, and laid a hand on his arm.

Creegan lay like a stone, his eyes begging Kildare.

"Let me do this job, Bixby, will you?" asked Kildare.

"Why not?" said Bixby. "I'll ring the office."

"My God, doc," said Creegan.

"It's going to be all right," said Kildare.

"You mean you'll do the whole job with your own hands?"

"The whole job," said Kildare.

"From first to last, and nobody else touch me?"

"Nobody else, Tim."

"Love of God, it's more'n I could ask for. . . . Would somebody please tell Minnie, where she's waiting in the room, half wild, poor thing? Would somebody please to tell her that the doc is going to do it all with his own hands, and there's no worry no more?"

Someone left the room.

"Now," said Kildare, nodding to the anaesthetician. "Careful, please . . . it's going to be easy, Tim . . . First you'll feel a little shut off in the breathing, but keep on breathing slow and deep. . . . I'm right here. This is my hand on your hand. I won't stir away till you're sound asleep, and you'll wake up better than new. . . ."

There was not a stir from Creegan, only a deeply rumbled murmur of content.

AFTER a while the great Gillespie came in, and the operating room drew to a fine tension under those all-seeing eyes.

"Not going so fast today, Jimmy, I see," he said.

"No, sir," said Kildare.

"Man has a belly like an ox!" said Gillespie. "Plenty of bottom to *that* animal. Ten men like that could lift the Empire State Building. . . ."

There was a slight confusion at the door. A nurse spoke to someone outside who insisted on coming in. Finally she returned with a slip of paper, deeply stained with red at one corner.

She said: "A message for you, doctor."

"Later on," said Kildare.

"No, doctor. Now!" insisted the nurse.

He saw the bigness of her eyes through the white mask.

"Well?" he said, taking the paper.

"An officer brought it from Joe Weyman, the ambulance driver. He was hurt in an accident. And he gave the officer this message. . . . And he died, doctor."

"Weyman? Dead?" said Kildare.

He took a deep breath, shrugged back his shoulders, and read the message.

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Mary Lamont leaves Pier Forty-three at seven o'clock bound for South America.

He crumpled the paper and let it drop; then he leaned over the operation again. His hands were a little slower, but perfectly sure. Gillespie had caught the crumpled paper out of the air. He smoothed it.

"Hold on!" said Gillespie. "Bixby, can't you take this over? There's a terribly important thing for Kildare to do."

"I'm glad to take over," said Bixby. "Thanks, Jimmy. You just run along."

"I promised him," said Kildare through his teeth.

"You fool!" cried Gillespie. "There's not twenty minutes before the sailing. If you miss her now, you've missed her forever. And what's Creegan but a human ox, anyway?"

"I promised him," said Kildare. "From the first touch to the last stitch, it's to be all my work."

"Then, by God, you're right," said Gillespie.

He whirled the wheelchair around.

"Open that door—and get out of my way!" he ordered.

THE last visitors were off the *Caballero* when a man in white was pushed up the gangway by a second white-clad figure. The second officer met them at the head of the gangplank.

"Entirely too late for visitors, sir," he said.

"It's not too late for me. I'm not a visitor," said Gillespie.

"What is this all about, sir?" asked the officer.

"It's a melodrama," said Gillespie. "There's gold in them hills; and there's a girl in the hands of Indians—and you're the Indians, brother. And I'm the United States cavalry to the rescue. Get passenger Mary Lamont up here to me, and get her fast!"

"It's Dr. Gillespie, of the Blair General Hospital; it's the great Gillespie himself," the ambulance driver was explaining to the purser of the little ship.

A moment later Mary Lamont was brought into the purser's office and faced the belligerent stare of Gillespie.

"Leave us alone," said Gillespie, to the ship's officer. "Now, Mary, what hellish contraption are you up to now?"

"I'm taking my brother to a place where he can have quiet and a change," she said.

"And leaving Kildare in hell about you, eh?"

"If I've upset him a little, he'll soon be all right," she said.

"Fallen out of love, have you?"

"I'm sorry, doctor."

"Cool about it all, ain't you?"

"We weren't right for one another. It's much better this way," she said.

"He don't amount to much in your eyes, it seems?"

"I'm afraid not, doctor," she said.

"Why, what a little tin-whistle, penny-a-dozen liar you turn out to be!" said Gillespie. "Get down on your knees and ask God Almighty to forgive you for being such a liar!"

"I'm not lying, doctor," she said.

"You are! You're lying, and lying and lying in every line of your little wooden, white face. Why do you keep your hand over your heart, except that the thought of Kildare is killing you every minute?"

"No, doctor," she said.

"Don't 'no, doctor' me, either. Do you think that you can fool me, you empty-headed little rattle-rap? Do you think that I don't know you like a book? Yes, a first grade reader. Words of one syllable. That's how simple you are to me."

"Doctor Gillespie, I'm sorry that you're wrong."

"Sorry, are you? I'll make you a damned sight sorrier. Pull that chair over here beside me. . . . Now sit down in it. . . . Now put your head on my shoulder."

He pulled her forcefully down to him.

"Now cry, you little fool!" said Gillespie. "You're not right for one another, eh? It's better this way, is it?"

She began to tremble. She clutched her face with both hands, but the tears forced through.

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There was a strong knocking at the door.

"The ship sails in five minutes!" called the purser.

"Get the luggage of Mary Lamont and her brother on shore," said Gillespie. "Get it right out on the dock, or I'll make you wish that you had yellow fever on board instead of me!"

"I can't go back to him," whispered Mary.

"Can't you? You're not going back. You're being carried back, and I'm the one that's doing the carrying."

"You don't know—oh, you don't know!" she gasped. "It isn't only the one stain in my family's blood. There are two. I can't marry Jimmy. I can't marry him, I can't I can't have children. There was another dreadful case. . . ."

Her hand instinctively found the second letter from her cousin. It had arrived only that day and she exposed the moist twist of it inside the handkerchief which she carried.

"There was my poor uncle. He died in an institution in Peoria. And now there's Douglas—and I don't even dare think of marriage, and the curse I could bring to poor Jimmy's life!"

"What are you talking about?" said Gillespie. "There's no 'institution' for the insane in Peoria; but there's a poorhouse there. Is that what you're talking about? And as for epilepsy, it's no more heriditable than measles, you little ramping, raving idiot! Not if there were ten cases in ten generations; it wouldn't mean a damned thing more than chance!"

"That isn't true!" whispered the girl. She slipped out of the chair onto her knees. She held one of Gillespie's old, tough hands between hers. "It isn't true. You're only making me crazy with happiness!"

"You'll be a damned sight crazier, then, when Kildare gets through with you."

THEY got Douglas Lamont to bed in the hospital. "Where I can watch his regime myself," said Gillespie, "because he belongs to you, and you to Jimmy, and Jimmy to me; so the whole damned tribe of you are in my pocket, where I intend to keep you till I'm satisfied. The whole damned kit and caboodle," said Gillespie. "Now we'll find Jimmy."

"Not yet," said Mary. "I'm going to ask Miss Cavendish, first, if she'll permit me to return to the hospital and then—"

"I'll attend to that Cavendish woman," said the terrible Gillespie. "You come with me and face the music."

So she had to go with him in the elevator down to the first floor. And there, in the hallway, they met Jimmy face to face, walking slowly, with the arm of little Sally, the telephone operator, drawn through his. And she, from the turn of her bowed head toward him, seemed still to be weeping.

He did not see them, so great was his preoccupation in Sally. They could not make out his words, but the gentle murmur of his voice was giving infinite comfort.

"Steady, steady, Mary," said Gillespie, as the two disappeared around a bend in the corridor. "Did you see what I saw? *Her* man is dead, Mary. . . . Medicine, surgery, panaceas—if I were a boy again, I'd make a new start all over again, and do you know what I'd do, my dear girl? I'd learn how to pray. I'd learn one damned good prayer and have it ready when the time comes that nothing else can help."

THE END

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

BEGINNING next week, ARGOSY will appear in new and finer dress. That should be no surprise to you, since we have been mentioning the change with considerable emphasis during these last few weeks. But now we give the announcement dignity and authority by making it in this department.

It's possible that some of you will be disturbed to hear that ARGOSY is changing, and so we hasten to say that you need not be. For the type and quality of fiction will remain precisely the same; the editorial standards will not be altered. The new, larger size will permit us to get more words into each issue, and it will make the reading easier for you.

Those of you who have had qualms about the pulp appearance of ARGOSY will be vastly relieved, for the new format is dignified and distinctive. In short, it's the right suit of clothes, tailored to fit the ARGOSY that you know so well. America's oldest and best all-fiction magazine has a position to uphold; now it will be dressed suitably.

. . . Before we turn to the mail, we want to present a footnote to Robert Carse's "Stepsons of France." Mr. Carse has sent us a free translation of that Legionnaire song at the end of the story, and here it is:

When a man has lost his pay,
When some skunk has done him wrong,
All along,
He puts his shoes on his back
And in the hold of a ship goes to join
The Legionnaires.

HERE'S fan mail for Borden Chase. Note that it's from Cuba; Smooth Kyle had a lively time there, you remember, in "Crooked Caribbean Cross."

CHARLES WHITESHIELD

I have just finished Mr. Borden Chase's latest masterpiece, "Crooked Caribbean Cross." In common with all the Smooth Kyle novels, it hits the spot.

While I agree with a statement made by Don McNeil (Breakfast Club of the Air) this morning to the effect that "it's nice to live in a country where carving up the turkey and wiping out grease refer to a feast and not a blitzkrieg," the warning contained in Chase's novel should not be overlooked. The Sunday editions of the Miami *News* for late September and October recount the findings of a "snoop cruise" taken in the Caribbean, which should be of interest to you and my fellow readers.

ARGOSY is one of the few fiction magazines I can get hold of way out here in the middle of nowhere, that I really enjoy. I soon tire of reading an entire magazine of sports or detective stories, but ARGOSY offers a refreshing variety of consistently above-par reading.

"Satans on Saturn" looks top so far. Science fiction is my big weakness. How about Omega? I can appreciate a combination of science fiction and a disembodied entity's sense of humor.

I'll be looking for an even better ARGOSY this week. Until then—*adios.*

GUANTANAMO BAY, CUBA

Now we've just room for a note anent Robert Carse's "Street of Swords."

H. R. BOYER

I just want to tell you that "Street of Swords" by Robert Carse is one of the best stories you have printed this year. It is swell entertainment, and also I learned something from reading it. That is why I liked it especially. Tell Mr. Carse to keep up the good work.

NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Well, we *are* telling that to Mr. Carse; but we don't need to, really. His work is always good.

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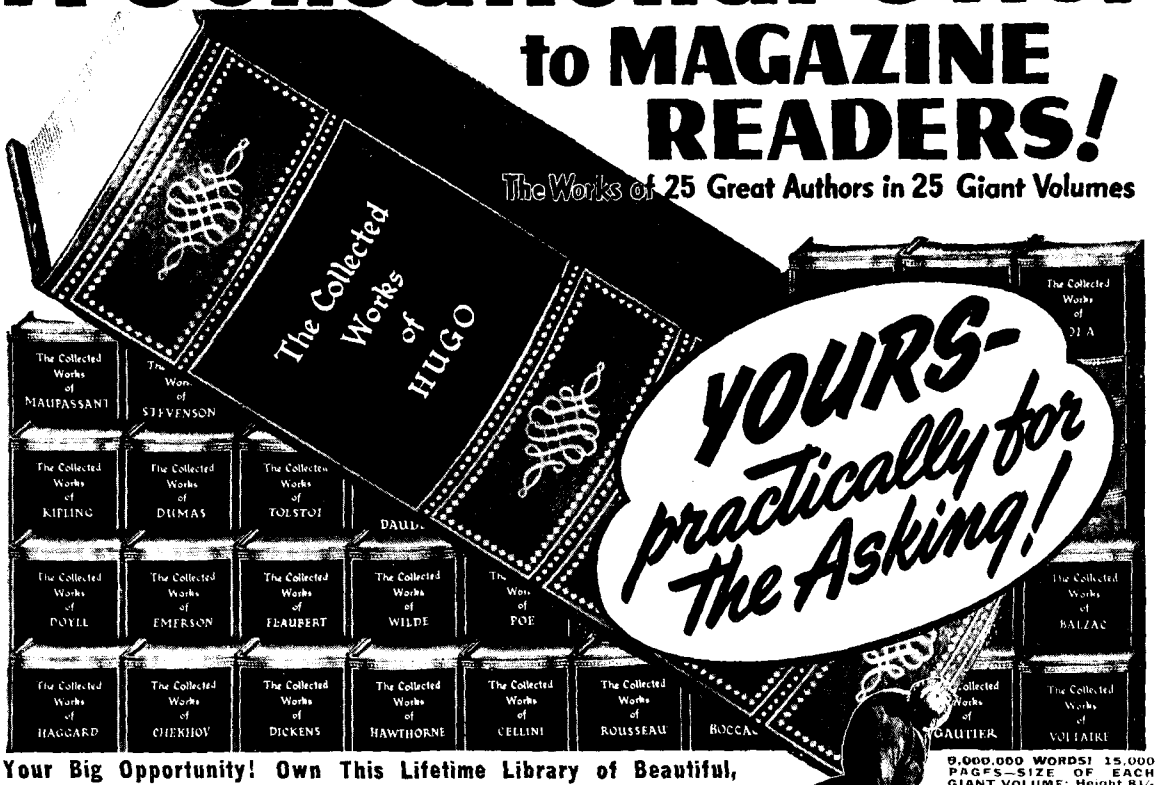
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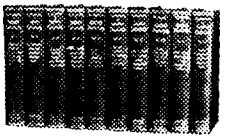

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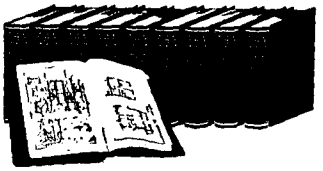

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